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Radiography Of The Matter. Herman Kolgen And The Sound Perception

Enrico Pitozzi



Herman Kolgen - Dust (2010) - Photo by Herman Kolgen

Among the interesting figures of the artistic panorama, Herman Kolgen lives in Montreal (Quebec, Canada). Audiokinetic sculptor, he works starting from the relationship between sound and image creating, from their divergence, works presented as installations, performances, sound sculptures, videos and cinematographic works – for example *Silent Room* (2005), film, installation and live performance created with the collaboration of the video artist and photographer Dominique [t] Skoltz with whom he founded in 1996 the multi-discipline cell Skoltz_Kolgen (followed by DigiMag several times in the past).

Since 2008 Herman Kolgen has inaugurated an individual path of radical interrogations about

audiovisual systems. His versatile work is characterized by an approach that we could define “radiographic” towards audio and visual material, in which the dimensions of the invisible and inaudible take its’ form by manifesting itself to the spectators sight. Attracted by the organic dimension, Herman Kolgen is inspired by the internal tension that lives the matter (tras)formation; this process brings him to create works where at the center the notion of time is placed.

Combined and associated with the digital, through an extremely sensitive job, the organic dimension is converged towards the presence of hybrid forms. His interventions integrate, also, radical work of audio spatialization, in which the physical space of the room, its’ volume, becomes pulsation geometry. His creations, in particular the project *Inject* (2009-2010), the recent one *Dust* (2010) and the installations called *Stochastic Process* (2010) and *Water Musik* (2010), are presented in various galleries and in the main electronic art festivals in Europe, America and Asia.



Herman Kolgen - Inject (2010) - Photo by Herman Kolgen

Enrico Pitozzi: Your work is an interesting example of integration between the image and sound. Could you explain more closely the method of integration used, by referring to your work as a whole, between these two dimensions?

Herman Kolgen: I have been preoccupied with this integration for a long time. As a young 12 year old, I used to play the drums whilst also displaying my first visual works in the town where I grew up. It was only later, around 18 years of age, that I started asking myself which direction I should go in, developing one art to its fullest. However I could never, for a long time, decide which course to take, or devote myself entirely to one art rather than another.

I always felt that perhaps the two dimensions could develop together, finding a common trajectory which could invent a particular language because of intersections, links, overlaps and operative influences. This aspect has also supported a

technical development that, over time, has allowed the computer to have a more powerful role, as it offers the possibility to work simultaneously on two languages ...

Enrico Pitozzi: ... it is as if the need for compositional order working simultaneously with video and sound is a technological answer to offer tools that go in the direction you want to track. This is work based on materials and their impact on quality perception. Could you outline some characteristics of your audio-visual language?

Herman Kolgen: I conceive sound and sight in the same way: to obtain a single homogeneous material which can be absorbed by the audience on an emotional level, thus bringing the technology used in the background. Sound and image, in this sense, are my dynamic material, palpable, which have a density, porosity, elasticity of time. Their common feature, in this sense, is that they are two materials that are developed and modified in the same space-time.

This is essential to develop an audiovisual language that is not simply the sum of sound and image, but that is the result of a series of assemblages and internal resonances materials. This temporal trajectory ties them intimately, so to be assigned a force impact on the viewer so

powerful that it penetrates his perceptual system. Despite inhabiting the body via different channels – traditionally through sight and hearing – it is in the display of the senses and emotions of the audience that the sound and image merge and fall apart, like a prism, to touch their perception.



Herman Kolgen - Stochastic Process (2010) - Photo by Herman Kolgen

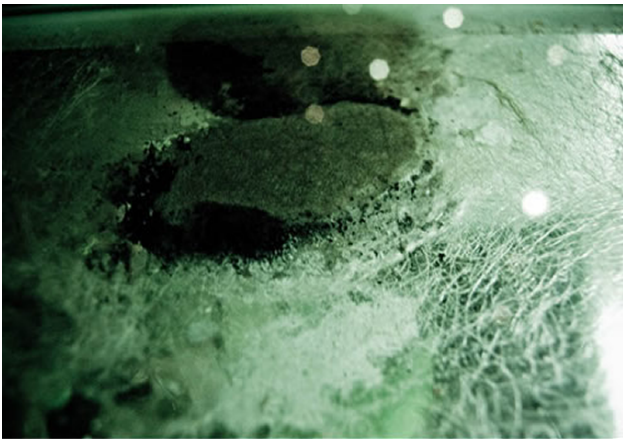
Enrico Pitozzi: On the contemporary electronic scene it is possible to outline two trends. Firstly the one that defines an organic line in which the articulation of sound and visual material tends towards a form of narrative. Secondly, an organic line in which external material tends toward abstraction. The two perspectives drawn do not necessarily conflict with each other but, rather, tend to link together. Could you look back on your work and explain this tension that binds abstraction and narrative in the treatment of materials?

Herman Kolgen: In my work compositional abstraction and narrative coexist without friction, they are developed from common

elements and then take different paths or directions according to the trajectories which they impart to each function.

In *Stochastic Process* presented recently in Geneva, I worked in the direction of pure abstraction, both the processing of visual and audio materials. Enclosed in a black space, a sound source holds in suspension light projected dust. The dynamic tension that produces the sound has a direct effect on the gravity of microscopic dust. The geography of these particles is therefore influenced by the variations that produce random breaks, sudden flow or, conversely, promote the formation of the highly organized, which is called, precisely, the *Stochastic Process*.

We are faced with an abstract landscape. However, if we focus on supporting the installation, there is a deep narrative trajectory that, as watermark, goes through materials by establishing a voltage level with the spectator senses. In this case, the narrative itself is abstract in that it does not have an identifiable form, but this does not stop it manifesting itself in other ways, so they can be absorbed unconsciously by the public.



Herman Kolgen - Water Musk (2010) - Photo by Herman Kolgen

Enrico Pitozzi: It is, therefore, a process that develops in a subliminal way, which passes through the transformation of matter ...

Herman Kolgen: The narrative trajectory is more or less determined by those who made up the performance, in this sense it may indeed be regarded as a subliminal dimension: at the level of composition, its degree of impact with the viewer may be designed. The materials are thus used in a way which enables the development of this intrinsic potential.

That being said, most of my work is one part abstraction and one part storytelling. Their relationship corresponds to some extent to the functioning of our structured thinking that is constantly pushed and supported by irrational thoughts - or even abstract impulses - which call the mind. All this cohabitates symbiotically without creating imbalances, creating a particular ecosystem in balance.

Though something, at first glance, may seem abstract - like a pulse that you can not decipher immediately - this does not mean that there is, inside a hidden meaning, a narrative path that they may develop, or bring out, conversely, decide to leave hidden. The composition is as if something passed through me, then it finds a sense of autonomy beyond the directions that can give my speech at work.

It is, in other words, it is a space preserved for something that may come unexpectedly. The unexpected is something that may not have an immediate sense, but this tension has an indescribable inner pulse that vibrates; it is possible to recognize - at the bottom of this pulsation - a particular energy that must be developed and that, whatever may take a shape or sound or even develop a new way so finding points of convergence between the two dimensions, where a sound pulse passes in the treatment and control of the image or vice versa.

I am interested in shaping unreal worlds, organizing them into a credible proposition. It is here, at this point that the relationship between the visual and sound elements becomes palpable tension, sulphuric pressure .



Herman Kolgen - Dust (2010) - Photo by Herman Kolgen

Enrico Pitozzi: In line with this principle of action on the matter, *Inject* allows the viewer to perceive a number of neurosensory changes and transformations to body of the performer – the fibers of the skin to the nervous system – in response to the tank of water which it is contained. Could you describe, in short, the process of composing this work?

Herman Kolgen: A human body is immersed in a tank. In the course of 45 minutes, the liquid pressure exerted on it increases the neurosensory changes. From its fibre in the epidermal nervous system, the body reacts to changes in viscosity of the liquid chamber. Its cortex gradually loses all knowledge of reality because of a lack of oxygen. The body of Yso, the performer, becomes a guinea-pig: a material body whose states are the subject of psychophysical kinetic paintings.

The visual material for this work was

composed in a single recording session lasting about six days. During this period the body of Yso is embedded in a tank full of water for more than 8 hours per day, ranging from the absence of gravity and lack of oxygen. With the help of various techniques of digital video recording systems and different cameras, I assembled several sequences in as many captured moments in time, resulting in a series of images that I then met a body of flexible and modular.

Enrico Pitozzi: I would like to refer back here to a point that was previously mentioned in our conversation: your work revolves around the notion of organic materials. *Inject*, which you just described, goes in this direction, but I also think the recent *Dust* and *Water Musik* do too. Could you clarify this important principle?

Herman Kolgen: I am interested in working with living matter. By this I do not only refer to living things in the proper sense, but what is changing, changing, in an evolutionary sense.

Water musik – which will be presented in Korea – is a sound installation – what might be inscribed in the framework of bio art – consists of six different interactive audio devices that work in a generic sense. The installation consists of a number

of snails immersed in a pool of water. They are equipped with a GPS sensor that tracks their movement in order to capture and analyze their behavior in the colony. The results of these behaviors are then transmitted to a system of musical composition that manages the data processing in real time.



Herman Kolgen - Inject (2010) - Photo by Herman Kolgen

The water in which they are immersed is thus tangible, allowing movement which creates the interactions between the different elements of the work. The shift in the space of living elements – such as snails or algae, for example, will affect the water movement. From this process you can then develop a form of sound interpretation of these shifts, giving rise to a material that can be captured, processed and retransmitted.

This device is part of a series of eight different installations, all designed in relation to living organisms. In every work I strive to have the raw material with which I am confronted with as

autonomous, self-sufficient. It is therefore a matter that has its own intrinsic impulsiveness with which I find common ground: I may use this energetic identity to lean towards creative impulses which can be contradictory or similar to its original quality. This attraction to the organic is not premeditated; it comes, instead, in a natural way, the sensitivity with which I perceive life. What interests me – at the heart of this belief – is the size evolution of things, their ability to maintain tension and constantly change.

One aspect particularly appeals to me: working with a form of magnification of things which allows me to understand what are the steps, from a number of factors, well organized and structured, which lead to the design of systems that are far more detailed and unique.

Dust

In *Dust*, for example, I try to give shape to this process. I worked so closely with the matter that a pile of dust became for me a very complex system, capable of detecting other areas of dust as articulated universes. With this process there developed a particular notion of time, especially with this work. The matter becomes very similar to an 'organic' elastic band that stretches and contracts. Tension reveals details that at first sight seemed non-existent.

At the moment, to provide an example, I am working with wind. For me, wind is a material, even though very dynamic and volatile, which exceeds my understanding and my expectations, because if you just add an obstacle to the device – a cylinder, a perforated wall – and all the internal turbulence is affected. Thus I am trying to exploit this wind power as artistic material.



Herman Kolgen - Stochastic Process (2010) - Photo by Herman Kolgen

Enrico Pitozzi: This passage has opened up another central aspect of your work: the change of state of matter, where the relationship between the elements become magnetic, they have tension. This process involves the possibility of a visible and audible intensity that are not directly perceptible to the senses. Could you develop this argument through your audio-visual composition?

Herman Kolgen: I'm interested in making perceptible elements that somehow escape our attention. It fascinates me to give a form to what

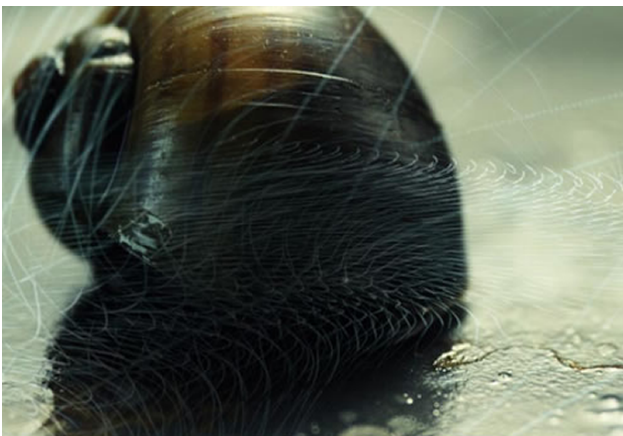
the eye cannot capture. I often think of things: if an object is a solid volume, it is because of all the tension which maintains a state of apparent repose. If you alter this balance, these bonds break up and the object simply becomes matter with volatile energy.

A friend who melts glass at high temperatures, is in daily contact with this change of state of matter caused by the molecules of glass subjected to heat. So, intervening with an external element on an object, we can drastically change its physical structure. This brings me, inevitably, to reflect on emotions and human perceptions: simply insert a disturbing element in someone's life and all its equilibrium can be threatened. Inject is the extreme case of this step.

In the absence of oxygen – an element which is always taken for granted – the mental and physical balance of the performer immersed in water is drastically disrupted, though, little by little, his emotional system and its physical structure finds a new balance from the conditions which the body is exposed to. He is immersed in water and slowly this element becomes the new condition by which to renew the balance and this has a direct impact on its physical and emotional state. It is about a new affiliation. Curiously, during the shooting, this is what occurred: after 24 hours, YSO did not want to get out

of the tank in which it was immersed.

His whole body, including its metabolism, had re-established a new general equilibrium, including a new rhythm of the movement which was more difficult, slower, but perhaps more conscious; the same thing for his breathing. Regarding its isolation from hearing – the immersion required him to feel a whole within the body, focusing only on its functions – is also a solution in a new order. I think such an experience, at first sight traumatic, had become for him, little by little, meditative and beneficial



Herman Kolgen - Water Musk (2010) - Photo by Herman Kolgen

Enrico Pitozzi: The transformation of matter – the threshold between the visible and invisible, audible and inaudible – is also dedicated to your latest project, *Dust*. Could you resume, in brief, some features?

Herman Kolgen: Inspired by the photo of Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray – *Elevage de poussière* (1920) – *Dust* proposed the exploration inside a

particular matter: dust. From the threshold of imperceptibility, some pigments are suspended around a magnetic field. They are organized in random fibrous networks and have become one of the compositions of hypnotic complexity: real webs, diagrams of powder. The particles of sound, associated with the bright images, are treated here on a scale which will clear all references and any system of recognition is sidelined. We are inside the matter, in an unequivocal manner.

Dust is a link between the invisible and visible, where the dust becomes a vertigo and produces, on the surface of the video, an accumulation visible as X-ray: crossed the threshold of visibility, you plunge into the dust, in its fibers in its deep structure.

Enrico Pitozzi: So we are faced with an x-ray of the material as the key principle of your work. *Dust*, in this sense, seems to me a representation of the structure that makes up the real, a link manifested in the form of light and sound pulses. This brings into play a work the size of the infinitely large as well as the infinitely small, which is very present in your compositions. Could you expand on this subject?

Herman Kolgen: Thanks to new digital tools we can enter into the material. It is clear that previously I could, to a

certain limit, change the time scale – for example a picture – slowing down or accelerating through the manipulation of video, but this was limited to simple multiplication of frames: no additional information was truly revealed. Now the margin of action available is totally different and it also develops at different levels. We have access, for example, to high-speed video cameras that have the ability to capture images of information-impossible to perceive with the naked eye.

These super high-speed cameras were originally designed to solve problems related to industrial production, and are now widely accessible to all, their use can then be developed in an artistic sense. The high power of receiving information – up to 2000 fts – allows us to catch up to fifty times more than what we normally perceive with our eyes. All of this information shows how visual character, beyond our perception, reveal qualities of matter to which we have no access.



Herman Kolgen - Dust (2010) - Photo by Herman Kolgen

Enrico Pitozzi: This brings into play, as mentioned above, the notion of time. This formula can be considered a summary of your audiovisual work. Could you summarise, finally, this idea?

Herman Kolgen: The concept of time – which is commonly known as the fourth dimension – has become, in so far as to what was previously noted, a malleable material like sound or image. All this has to do with access to a different time scale, here we are very close to Einstein's theory of relativity of time.

When we enter the space-time inside the invisible matter, our whole perception changes, we look for a new position. This means that we can work – with the support of technology – on an infinitely small time scale, almost to the point where time seems to stop (freeze system). When everything seems still and we approach the smallest particle of matter, we realize that this too, despite everything, is constantly moving and looking for a

dynamic relationship with the environment.

From here, we can therefore design autonomous virtual systems which are in perpetual motion, according to precise rules or random dynamics. For example, in addition to these inherent rules, the action taken by decreasing the behavioral factor up to grade 0, the system will stop to interact. It will be like in levitation, but the virtual camera – our eyes – can still navigate the system freezes, the suspension of time.

Alongside this, the notion of coexistence between two different space-time dimensions is a very interesting idea full of creative consequences. It is here, through these dimensions, that time becomes palpable matter, a malleable and organic quality.

I remember – at the beginning of my first digital audio work in the late eighties – I explored the extension of a sound expansion in order to produce a series of sounds which reflected a complex rough surface, thus producing a quality of sound that was completely different, it no longer had any relation to any reference. However, this particular quality was, after all, already contained in the matrix, but at an inaudible level.



Herman Kolgen - Inject (2010) - Photo by Herman Kolgen

I applied the same notion of temporal flexibility to my visual work with a lot more accuracy and precision, a dozen or so years later, when the technology permitted me to.

So what I'm interested in this aspect, is to intervene in order to create an organic relationship between sound and visual material, although this in itself is not the purpose of my work ... well, it is only as it responds to my main concern: to investigate the quality of sensory perception.

Therefore there are three levels in my view composition which are inseparable: the magnification of optics, micro-sound and the time in a microscopic scale. I wish that these three elements have a constant dynamic relationship between them, as if I were a slider in the positioning of the optical, auditory and temporal, which are in motion but always dynamically interrelated.

<http://www.kolgen.net/>

Vjing For Lights And Colors. The Sketch Projector Of Shantell Martin

Silvia Bianchi



Shantell Martin - Sketch Projector

Shantell Martin is an illustrator and an English Vj who has fused the latest technology and traditional media in a new and unique style through which she creates performances using her drawings. She began her journey as a traditional illustrator, until she discovered that she could draw with the graphic tablet and project what she was doing during concerts, happening and performances.

She soon became internationally known for her video performances, in which she draws live on people using projections and markers, Shantell uses the audience as inspiration creating unpublished visuals every time. With a very simple method she was able to bring her visuals everywhere, breaking the wall of prejudice about this kind of performances.

For some years now having moved from Japan to New York, she recently performed at the MOMA, at the Music Hall of Williamsburg and at the Hidden Ora in Tokyo, and she has been invited as a new talent to the annual PSFK conference, a New Yorker company in charge of new business.

Through her inconondibile features Shantell creates delicate worlds continuously in transformation, populated by semi-human and animals. After having climbed to the top of the Vj world, she writes for the magazine "Dj Mag", Shantell has expanded her conception of the traditional drawings combining light, improvisation and interaction with the audience. Are your ready to meet her?



Shantell Martin - Sketch Projector

Silvia Bianchi: Your carrier started as

an illustrator, when and how did you start to work projecting your drawings?

Shantell: The projector is just a tool to make what would otherwise be quite small or detailed bigger than life. I started to do this in Japan in 2006 as a way to take my illustrations out of a room and into a space with a live audience so they could see my illustrations unfolding.

Silvia Bianchi: You transformed the use of the graphic tablet in a simple way to come in contact with the people, in an era in which everything is very post-product. Do you think that the result of your work comes from the tendency to retrieve the analogical?

Shantell: With any big move in consciousness or culture or technology there's a reflex to go back to the past. Yes, I'm using technology, but it's an ordinary pen I'm using in a digital way. At its simplest level it comes back to me physically drawing, and that's something people can relate to. It's not out of their reach.

Silvia Bianchi: What is your background? Which are your origins and your main influences?

Shantell: I grew up in Southeast London hanging out and playing in the streets. I didn't really draw much. I got into art a bit later-I didn't take it

seriously until I went to art school at age 19. I studied graphic design at Central Saint Martins and specialized in illustration. My influences are immediate: what's going on in my life, around me, in front of me. It's hard for me to go out and seek influences- whatever's bumping up into me right now is what informs my work. A way to make that more abundant is to travel, explore, meet people, and soak up the environment.



Silvia Bianchi: You moved from London to New York passing by Tokyo. What have you learned from these places in terms of visual culture and also about the people with whom you have worked with?

Shantell: I lived in Japan for almost five years, and living in a country and culture that's completely different from where I come from gave me the space to figure out who I was and what I wanted to do. I didn't have to live up to anything-there were no stereotypes set up for me. In Japan, a

place with so much equipment and technology around, allowed me to explore who I am and what I wanted. Now in New York that process has allowed me to work out what I do with what I've honed. This city is a platform that pushes you to do what you want to do, or else you get out.

Silvia Bianchi: How is being a Vj considered Japan and in New York?

Shantell: In Japan it's huge. VJs are on the flyers and on the bills, and venues and clubs are very much equipped with what you need: big screens, mixers, good projectors. In New York it's the opposite. Ordinary spaces or clubs don't encourage visuals here. Japan is a very visual culture so it's expected. It's not expected here-you have to call to check if they even have a projector. In the smallest space in Japan they'll have a screen and projector and staff. It's not that there's no interest, but you might have to be prepared to bring your own stuff. That's been a learning experience that has angled me into places I wouldn't usually do live visuals. As soon as I graduated I moved to Japan so I don't have much knowledge of how it works in Europe. Here in New York, you still need to seek out these opportunities and spaces out a little. It's two-sided.

Silvia Bianchi: Recently you performed at the MOMA, at the Gershwin Hotel,

at the Collette Blanchard and you held a conference at the PSFK. How do the cultural institutions and art galleries act towards your type of performances?

Shantell: Here in New York you must be ready to look for situations and find opportunities. But in general we say that it is bivalent, there is interest from both sides.



Silvia Bianchi: Did you find difficulty in the world of contemporary art proposing yourself with a pretty visionary method like the sketch projection?

Shantell: The only difficulty is that people want to put you in a box. When they see something they don't quite understand or haven't seen before, the tendency is to ignore it, or perhaps not encourage it, because they can't categorize it. What I do is a bit of a hybrid: it's live, but uses technology, but also drawing, and in a traditional scene people sometimes don't know what to do with

that./SPAN>

Silvia Bianchi: You work with many different techniques: tape art, illustrations, painting .How do you prepare the performances and how do you create the connection with people?

Shantell: The joy of how I work is that I'm 100 percent improvised. I'll find the tools of what I want to use for example, tape, a park, and friends-and we'll just see what happens. That's the great thing. If you gave those things

to kids you would expect them to have fun. So why not the same with adults? It still works. It's the same. And it's the same with drawing on people. The space will work with what we've got. We're supposed to be more rigid and want to work to guidelines as adults, but actually we'll all quite happily have fun spontaneously if we're given the opportunity.

<http://www.shantellmartin.com/>

Verbo: Among Graffiti and Digital. Plotterflux, Videoincursioni And Mapping

Claudio Musso



Plotterflux / Frontiers 2009 - Photo by Elena Rota

At first there was the bomb, the bomb was the *writing*. But then light came. Nothing easier than creating a word play when the subjects of this operation are: the *writing* and a writer named Verbo (literally: the Word) (aka Mitja Bombardieri).

During the first years every *writer* puts himself through a long training that, necessarily in the street, goes through the assimilation of basic concepts such as speed, precision and style. Generating a personal style is the *condition sine qua non*, not only for recognizability needs, but specially for the chance to express ones imagination, which often originates from an heterogeneous amalgam (mass media, comics, traditions...)

Verbo, once the initial training is over,

runs a pictorial research focused on the *writing*, on its basic features and on the style innovation elements developed over time. Its alphabet is influenced by metallic reflexes of robots that populate the *manga* and *anime* universe, its letters are shielded by an inviolable chromatic-chiaroscuro armour.

The contamination with the videographic and digital culture is mostly experiential, biographical we might say. Even though, the vjing, live media's background soon becomes a part of Verbo's curriculum. This may also be a reason for the idea of combining the technical-practical knowledge acquired during the video post-production with graffiti.



Plotterflux / Frontiers 2009 - Photo by Elena Rota

His project *Plotterflux* can be defined

as a concrete realization of the medial drift of *writing*. Born from the contamination from the “other” visual languages – photographic, cinematographic, audiovisual in general – this performance allows to the Bergamasterz (Verbo, Font, Hemo, Loathin, Alfa) crew to perform in a live media which unites on the same surface the color’s materiality with the projection’s immateriality. As to the contents the password is *free style*: free associations of ideas, indiscriminate superimposition of concepts, sudden linguistic accelerations and sharp syntactic brakings.

The *Video Incursioni* (literally: Video Raids), that bring the project *Plotterflux* to freely express its luminous tags in public spaces, represent the sum total of a journey which began in the street and cannot end elsewhere. The usage of light in place of color (projectors in place of bombs), allows to appear and disappear even faster leaving no evidence, on the walls at least.

The pre-production (digital elaboration, *Software engineering*) shifts to post-production (*live mix-video*), engaging a guerrilla warfare made of symbols, icons and marks which temporarily harbour in disparate urban contexts. The password is *free style*: free associations of ideas, indiscriminate

superimposition of concepts, sudden linguistic accelerations and sharp syntactic brakings.

Also exploiting the usage of an hybrid technology such as the *mapping*, ideal for architectural façades and sculptural presences, that, starting from scanning of the physic elements, composes dynamic narrations which are able to activate the surfaces touched by the projections.



Videoincursioni - Milano Castello Sforzesco 2009 - Courtesy of Verbo

Claudio Musso: The writing has brought a “wave of freshness” in the artistic view in which it was born and in which it grew up. Experiences of combinations of technology and manual skill, such as *Plotterflux*, in which directions do they lead?

Verbo: *Plotterflux* is an experimental synesthetic performance originated from years of technical experiences in expressive fields such as liveset audio/video and pure writing. The journey of the light tells, and the writer’s shadow marks and underlines the pictorial resultant. This

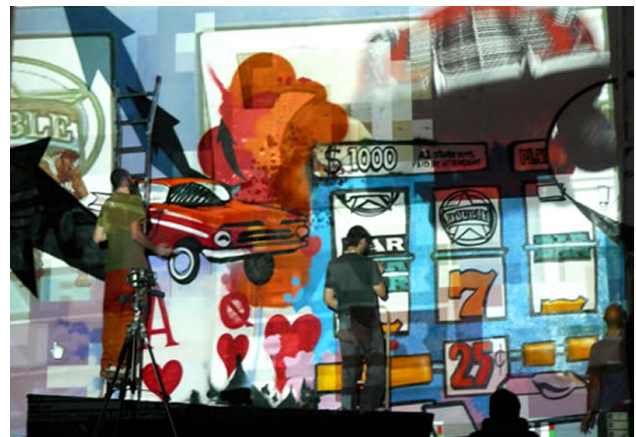
performance is possible, on one hand, thanks to the writer's quick technical gesture, on the other hand thanks to the FLxER, software for the live video which I've been developing for years together with Gianluca Del Gobbo and the FLxER team, this software allows a very easy layout for video elements.

So Plotterflux wants to exploit the pictorial skill, the mark of the writing applied to a limited temporal space which often happens when the writer operates illegally, exploiting, this way, the performative skill of the writer who, by its own nature, is forced to the action painting. After all it has been a good way to express other ideas outside of the narrow field of writing, thanks specially to the mutable and "gaseous" video element.

Claudio Musso: In your pictorial path, the stylistic evolution has brought you to absorb imaginations, such as the ones of anime, and to deconstruct explosively the graphic element of a single letter. In both cases an influence from the cinematographic culture is clear and also the research of a cinematic dynamism.

Verbo: Aside from reckoning that the visual food on which each of us has grown up is very important, which strongly influences my pictorial output, also the sign researches of my letters also belong to an evolutive scheme typical of writing, bonded to

the "dynamism of letters", to "Loops" and to "Armours". Playing with these three ways of making writing I decided to transform these ways in true biomechanical armours, that protect the soul of the letter which is inside, by celebrating the "battle of letters" fiction in the myth of the writer's exploit...just like a hero of any manga....



Plotterflux - Photo Courtesy of LPM 2007

Claudio Musso: I reckon that the *Videoincursioni* deserve a proper space. In this case, aside of some elements precious to street art, we find that light (of the projector) substitutes color (of the bomb), but that's not all...

Verbo: *Videoincursioni* first of all represent my need of going back to the street after a long time spent in the spaces of electronics and visuals. Going back to the invasive gratifications of the writer, though using the potentiality of a video light beam in the city. Appear and disappear, and therefore seducing: come to produce concepts dedicated

to the context in places hardly accessible to painting for instance, like when I projected on the Pirelli skyscraper and on the Castello Sforzesco in Milan or on the Coliseum in Rome...

Claudio Musso: The video mapping, whether you apply it to architecture, to installation or to objects, it has the ability of animate static surfaces, providing them with a chromatic and dynamic changeability. What exactly goes on in this kind of operations?

Verbo: Mapping is a video technique suited for architecture and we are using it a lot in different jobs, also commercial ones with the Project.On.it group. Lately I am testing it on my installations, on my pieces to play a bit with the lights, shadows and colours in a dynamic and interactive way, always in a “scenical” perspective in this movie that I am “shooting” about writing.

Claudio Musso: One last curiosity: I know that you have been working on a “corporate graffiti” project, using inexorable axioms of the discipline (choice of a name, study of a tag, development of a personal style...) in a bank. How did that go? And what did you learn from this experience?

Verbo: Lately I am working on mark and contrast other than the medium, and thus this work was great. The

bank wanted a street art work done and to make it I got directly in touch with 60 managers who offered themselves as mediums, eseguendo una mia idea performativa inserita nei loro programmi di incentive. I subtitled it “corporate graffiti” since I worked mostly on the identity, disguising them all and homologating them, so being anonymous they were able to freely express themselves about their social conventions, it worked so well that, armed with markers, rollers and brushes, they literally devastated 7 floors of stairs in the bank.



Plotterflux - Bergamasterz + DJBonnot - La Domenica delle Salme Remix

The chaos that came to be was then the perfect support that was needed to contrast with my pictorial mark and the lettering that I painted (my whole alphabet). This experience has been useful, for everyone who was involved in it, to understand the value of identity and the strength that originates from contrast, from confrontation and therefore from dialog, right inside a structure which,

by its own nature, tents to
homologate people.

Thus the whole work is in sharp
contrast with the bank's interiors,
offices and austere spaces, where I
wanted to recreate the vitality typical
of the street, where thousands marks
narrate its life, where every day order
and disorder dance together as they

are absolutely necessary elements.

<http://www.v3rbo.com>

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/meta
2](http://www.flickr.com/photos/meta2)

<http://www.project-on.it>

Science And Mind. Mikael Metthey's Interaction Design

Henriette Vittadini



Mikael Metthey - Una Persona viene visitata da un Pathogoon Hunter

Within the current context of critique and practical artistic activity, predominantly based on now well entrenched mechanisms of expression pivoted on subversion, destruction of rules, rough and direct exposition of the violent attacks against both the artistic and social status quo, French-born 27-year-old interaction designer Mikael Metthey, structures his own critical speech along wider periphrases.

He in fact harnesses his profession's very specific procedural mechanisms, combining them with his artistic intelligence. The outcome is artworks, projects which investigate the development and interaction between new technologies, science and design. It is equation of relationships in which human

behavior each time embodies the unpredictable and unavoidable variable which defines each result.

Concretely, Mikael Metthey's artistic practice consists in the creation of interaction design products, those being not just merely functional to the critical speech but 'work' integrally, from the productive as well as from the artistic point of view. *Poxteddy* for instance, Metthey's university final project realized in 2007 when he graduated from the Royal College of Art in London, is a teddybear with a built-in capsule in which is possible to inoculate chickenpox virus. That way that children while enjoying playing with it would get infected by the virus 'naturally', thus avoiding the shock of vaccination and the risk of catching the disease in adult age, during which the damages caused by the virus would be extremely more serious.

In *The Minutine Space*, instead, being diseased has become the ultimate frontier of entertainment in a hypothetical future where virus threat has been completely defeated. In such future, whoever would want to experience the thrill of malady can

select a virus to be infected by and then arbitrarily decide when to be 'healed'. The language and mechanisms in Metthey's works are very simple yet very complex. He involves the observer, poses questions plays on the use of the ambiguous ethics entailed in each of his project.



Mikael Metthey - Tongue Convers per Individui "Aumentati"

In the subtle rhetoric of this artist's work, the transmission of contents happens 'indirectly', arising an emotional complex state of reflection. Such state is indeed centered on and endorsed by the element of disturbance, but is not merely directly referring to it..

Henriette Vittadini: You graduated as Interaction Designer from the London Royal College of Arts in 2007, During this period you started you artist activitiy up to exposing some of your works in London. Amsterdam and at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (2007, "Design and the elastic mind", exhibition already mentioned before in [Digimag 34 May 2008](#) -

<http://www.digicult.it/digimag/articloe.asp?id=1158>).

Your works, prototypes or concepts of hypothetical interaction design projects, are meant to explore the relationship between design, science, technologies under development and culture: questioning the visitor about his own role among these relationships. What drove you to start all this? What did your first works consist of?

Mikael Metthey: In my first works there has been a time of gradual understanding what I really wanted to do because my first interest was in graphics, digital media which is the course I first did and this led me to gradually absorb science and technology in a new light that attracted my mind because of their potential impact on society. Then it was a kind of logical progression towards what really interests me, which is the role of science in society and how we apply science in our everyday lives and how science makes us really different from all other species on hearth.

So I guess my work has this constant balance, this tendency to overlap in three main aspects of modern society which I believe are very important and these three axes are health, science and design.

The early work was perhaps less rooted in realism and tangibility because it was purely graphic or aesthetic and it kind of matured gradually towards things that are a bit more anchored in reality and have a bit more realism in the way that they can be either implemented or you can imagine to have them implemented in a relatively close future.

There is a certain way of seeing design in these days which is trying to absorb it in a different light or trying to see it in a different way which is how to see design not as a source of aesthetic consideration, but rethinking some aspects of design and how this kind of things merge with art because they raise questions; so how do you design to ask questions?

How do you design for debate? Are your questions raising the right issues and pushing for the right discussions, those discussions that we should be having right now because technology is advancing and our perception of it is lagging behind.



Mikael Metthey - The Minuteline Space

Henriette Vittadini: Which was the first project you felt as truly significant within this philosophy?

Mikael Metthey: My first work, the one that really got me going in first place was my graduation project called *Poxteddy*

(<http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2008/elasticmind/index.html#/209/>), and that was when I graduated at the Royal College of Art in 2007. It is a product, a medical device to expose children to chickenpox at early age and to kind of commodify viruses as means to an aim which in this case is to build up immunity to chickenpox at early age by a different method.

A method that some parents already sometimes use to deal with chickenpox is to arrange chickenpox parties and these parties would be arranged to make children exchange the virus and therefore to give the social aspect to an immunity program, in a sort of way- a kind of social vaccination.

I was directly attracted by the idea that people are capable of this kind of behavior which seems very irrational at first but it's rooted in a very rational idea which is to immunize their kids against a really serious disease. So when you step back from that, you realize there's a whole opportunity for

you to design in this whole field about how do you use modern technology to improve people's lives, to carry the message that technology can help doing things differently, in a more controlled way.

Poxteddy, I think it was a good starting point for exploring the idea that in the future viruses will not be treated as this devastating lethal power, but they will actually be tamed and used for more positive purposes. The objects were these figurative prototypes that were tested by confrontation with the public and they were a kind of stimulation for the public to respond to, they were aimed to stimulate a debate about this technology, whether it was ethical or outrageous. So this project was interesting because it was a probe into what people think, it was a way to tease people into give their opinion about science and medicine, so whether they would trust medicine or whether they wouldn't.

I am not looking to upset people with this projects but more to stimulate a reaction and in this case I did get some reactions that were maybe not directed straight to the product itself but more toward the idea of infecting your children on purpose or to use viruses as a commodity. The product itself doesn't make such a point, the idea is that society seems to be split in two branches when it comes to

chickenpox: the ones who believe that vaccines are efficient and trustworthy and the ones that don't, and the ones that don't would doubt everything and in a way by offering this product they will doubt even more because it's a manifestation of science and engineering and it is in a way providing a kind of tangible thing to criticize.

Obviously a certain amount of the aim of this project was to stimulate discussion, so it had to shock, it had to be something that people would feel strong about.

They might love it, they might hate it but as you can see I'm not giving them the answers, I'm just creating a product that raises questions. I'm not answering anything, I'm just putting issues in front of people, delimiting a certain area of discussion and it's up to people to decide where they stand and whether their opinion can change, grow, evolve into something different because of their perception of life and science. So you could say this is an art piece where the message is not included inherently to the device, the message comes out of people. And this is quite recurrent in my work.



Mikael Metthey - Strumento utilizzato dal Pathogoon Hunter

Henriette Vittadini: There is also another project, *Vaccination Playground*, in which you address the issues of viruses and children's immunization through alternative methods but in this latter case it is more targeted at the children's point of view. How did you start the project? How did you start developing the idea?

Mikael Metthey: *Vaccination Playground* is something more than that because it deals with something that is kind of personal to me as well as many other people which is when you are a child and you have the compulsory vaccination at school it is usually quite a traumatic experience, which is quite brutal, because it's a mechanical nearly industrial way of vaccinating kids; so I was looking at this from my own perspective thinking 'why hasn't this been enhanced?', since it can create some tensions and frustration for many kids. So my idea was to design experience in that case, to facilitate the

vaccination process and to make it be much less invasive emotionally.

The idea is a playground by which when kids interact with the devices in it they get the vaccination, so imagine it a bit like the today's playgrounds, but where the playground is designed to receive one kid at a time and by direct contact with the devices the kids would get administered the right vaccines at the right quantity through microneedles specifically designed for hypodermic transmission of vaccines which are so tiny that you can hardly feel them, so in a way that children don't realize because ultimately they're just playing games and having fun, which is the whole essence of the project.

I believe the process should be evolving as our technologies are evolving, we shouldn't be stuck to ancestral ways just because we have been doing it for so many years before and they have proved to be efficient enough, I believe we need to go forward.

When I was vaccinated when I was a kid, the pediatrician was actually trying to distract me, to completely divert my attention by some silly ways that worked, and that reminded me that you don't need much to divert the attention and therefore to brake these kind of false expectations of vaccination which are not necessary, I

believe. We have the technologies to erase them and I don't see why we are not doing it.



Mikael Metthey - Una persona "Aumentata" mostra fieramente la lingua

Henriette Vittadini: In your work you are often addressing the issue of technological development and how one can make use of it (without abusing of it), but there is also a backdrop dealing with prejudice and behavior culturally generated toward science and technology, things that might affect our way of looking at the new technologies currently in development. Is it legitimate to say that your works are meant to make us more conscious of mentioned prejudices and a step forward toward, a better relationship within the scientific-technological milieu?

Mikael Metthey: Much of my work is about the perception that you have of science. A few years ago, when I was in the RCA we were actively engaged with the world of the nanotechnology, and at the time Prince Charles made this incredible comments about how he sees nanotechnology as this very

potentially dangerous, evil technology and giving his reservations about new science, because effects of such technologies are relatively unknown.

That clearly defines the conservative way of thinking in general whereas there is a period of fear which is inevitable because you are crossing new horizons and you don't know what's going to happen, and with his notoriety he raised those issues with the media and I think in that way he refrained some of the advance that could have been popularized much faster if he hadn't made these comments.

I think in general the way science and technology are perceived and developed, make you end up to deal with problems or opportunities that shake the established rules and by doing so you obviously upset people and by upsetting people you create debate and putting ideas forward you create new ideas, which people absorb and get used to the idea that we are not a stagnant species and I think technology is a tool that makes us face the reality of things which is that we are an evolving species in terms of how we perceive the world..

I still believe in science as relatively free from human emotions, because science speaks by itself, science is what you can try, what you can see, what you can test. However emotions

and opinions and frustrations and all this kinds of human emotions react to new technologies and science asking if it is socially acceptable or not to implement these new aspects of science in society and what is the good you get by doing it.

For example, what is the good of improving plastic surgery techniques? It's kind of advocating for the superficiality of men's ways but it all started out with medical purposes; we created plastic surgery to repair soldiers that came back mutilated from the war or for people that had terrible accidents that force them to live a reclusive life and science and technology permitted to these people to live a decent life.

Then obviously the maturity that we gained in these techniques kind of surpassed us in the way that we are now capable of enhancing ourselves with them, and now comes the question that can be applied to nearly all sciences which is: are we taking the sciences into human scale getting the advantages that we are supposed to get?

Is it worth it to bring science in this kind of direction or is it completely stupid and insane to want to improve yourself as a person? So I say that clearly the rule of technology in my work is always about these questions, that is whether or not we should

implement the new in our daily lives and whether it could improve our lives or not and make a difference for better or worse.



Mikael Metthey - Noise, prototipo della serie Augmented Reductions

Henriette Vittadini: In another work, *Augmented Reductions*, you created some devices with the task of providing “relief” from the stress of an excessive sensorial and physical efficiency obtained through a genetical reprogramming, possible in a hypothetical future. Where will our continuous, compulsive search for optimization take us? Will we be capable of developing ourselves into technological beings without losing our “humanity”?

Mikael Metthey: One of the pivotal points about what I do is this questioning on whether we need technology or not and in *Augmented Reductions* this is projected in a further future where biotechnologies have become predominant, so where through genes manipulation we can improve our bodies and enhance the qualities we already have like senses,

The scenario I'm giving is a moment in time where the persons that have been engineered realize that this is not what they want to be in life, they want to be normal, and that's where the design comes in, and creates the structures and the tools to allow you to level yourself to normality by therefore also making a strong statement to the others: that you are making an effort to hinder your qualities so that you would be able to fit in.



Mikael Metthey: There's a bit of this aspect of self-mutilation in the way in which you to prepare to make drastic changes to improve yourself, as plastic surgery for example, where you can decide to completely change the image of yourself to the others; in another way you also have the clear distinction of yourself by performing these acts, by wearing these devices that look quite brutal, as you said, and make a bold statement about your wish to become normal and in this strange act you are communicating the very basic aspect of the project which is 'what would it take for me to be normal and what do I have to tell to others so that they think of me as normal?'.

30

pertaining to what defines normality and reality is also the pivotal concept of another exhibition you participated to : I am obviously talking about [Niet Normaal](#), held in Amsterdam from December 2009 to March 2010. The projects exhibited were meant to explore the boundaries pertaining to the definition of normality as we receive it from our cultural legacies. Could you tell us a bit more about the work you prepared for this exhibition?

Mikael Metthey: The exhibition in Amsterdam called Niet Normaal was focused on the questions of normality and who decides what is normal and what is not and my take on it was trying to give people the sense of a space in which they could imagine a world where medicine and technology have become so good that we have managed to eradicate all diseases from the surface of the earth, therefore eliminating all kinds of fears and catastrophic scenarios about health. If you set that as the ground rule of the space, you can imagine that people would want to experience what it was like to have a disease because they would want to remember it as some kind of nostalgic act, as something they would want to physically relieve.

The space itself was delimited in five different devices that would project some different strains of influenza viruses as you were passing in front of

them and you could basically choose to focus yourself on a very specific strain, depending on how mortal it is or how virulent and also see the popularity of these viruses, for example would people choose the one that smells better, would people choose the one that killed the most people, or would they choose the ones that have a special meaning to them such as an emotional connection, maybe one of their grandparents died of this disease and they want to see how it felt like.



Mikael Metthey - Strutture Vaccinanti nel Playground

Henriette Vittadini: This is the core theme of another of your works, *The Minutine Space*, where the same route of infection is applied for a purpose which is essentially recreational, but in this case the disease experience is faced in a common viral area where individuals can have the pleasure of experiencing the disease in communal (the viral area is also provided with a central basin where one can vomit when feeling sick). How do you see this sort

of paradox turning something that is a biologically event driven to live in isolation into a social event?

Mikael Metthey: I think that when you get a disease by definition you have to confront a whole lot of etiquettes as well, so you can either be isolated, you can be integrated, attract the emotional attention of your surroundings, but in this very case I think that the grotesque in the project comes from the way in which it is banalized, in the way that you can just catch a virus, enjoy it and then get rid of it as easily as it has been caught.

My critique here is that when you make something not dangerous anymore, people would want to recreate the sensations, even if it's completely artificial. It's a little bit like bungee jumping, I think it's the search for the adrenaline kick and the way in which people are desperate for these sensations that make them feel like their life is in danger and feel the thrill of being able to confront death.

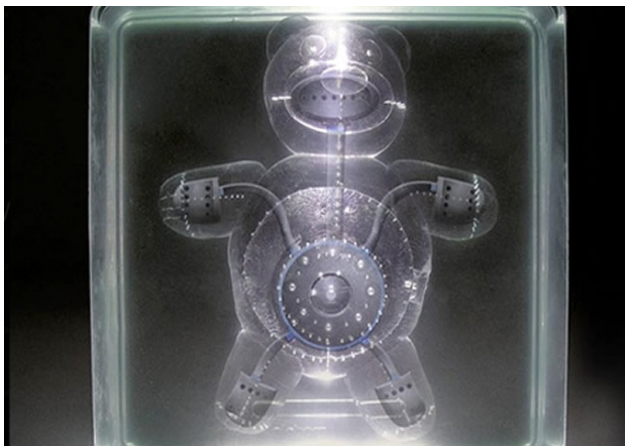
Henriette Vittadini: Should we reach a condition where all diseases and menaces are defeated and all the barriers imposed by our biological nature be overcome, what sort of situation would this condition of disconnection from any compulsory bond to the environment lead us into? What would we be left with?

Mikael Metthey: I think you are always left with questions, because you can never answer everything and when you answer one question you always open up a million more. I think we are in a kind of desperate race to answer as many questions as possible to create what I think is an illusion of control, because we are essentially slightly clueless about what the future holds for us, so by controlling these aspects of daily life we think we gain more security, thinking that we will be able to deal better with the future.

I think the merging with technology is already abundant around us, whether it's for prosthetics or even wearing a peacemaker, these are all tools that allow you to improve or extend your life or live it more normally. The society problems, the ethical problems, will be created by our response to new further steps of technology. The point of that is that with maturity this aspect of creating technology to level us to normality at some point surpasses us and becomes something that takes us again out of normality into special stratospheres of human beings. That is something that is very recurrent in my works as well: how is the body connected with technologies? how do we perceive our own bodies?

I want to put a mirror in front of people's face, saying "look at the technology you have, look at the

power you have, are you responsible enough to make use of these things in a positive way?" and I basically want to force people to make decisions. My primary concern is to explore the extremes: see how diverse we can get and see how our behaviors are going to interfere with technology, how we are going to create new behaviors, become new people, not only because technology but because our understanding of it.



Mikael Metthey - Prototipo di PaxTeddy

Henriette Vittadini: Recently, you displayed your work also at the [Impact Exhibition](#) (London, 16-21 March 2010), where graduates of interaction design at the Royal College of Arts cooperated with a team of researchers from the Engineering and Physical sciences Research Council. Your work which was translated into a video presenting the role of the *Pathogen Hunters*, individuals in charge of collecting and monitoring the "infectious organisms". This project is different from some of your previous works due to a closer

link between the future you are postulating and the present reality but also because it is your first collaborative project. How did you relate to the project and with the team?

Mikael Metthey: This project was, as you said, very different from the previous ones because the grounds were in current research and me and my colleague from the RCA, Susana Soares were working together with researchers from Newcastle University, who have a grant from EU to explore better ways to detect rapidly infectious organisms. They were designing specifically for hospitals, but as soon as we got in contact with them we realized that what they were working on was ultimately going to be spread in the commercial world and the use of this technology would probably be global, because they were designing devices that could let you know at anytime, anywhere, whether you would be surrounded by dangerous organisms and therefore how much risk do you have to face when you go toward a specific context or place.

Collaborating with them we had to be more grounded in reality by basically interpreting their research and they had to be flexible enough to understand that we will not be bound to the hospital only. So, building on that we decided to explore the notion

of the Pathogen Hunter, which is a role, a job designed by a governmental system and is dedicated to assessing risk and assessing the dangers associated with infectious organisms in the city environment, in high density population.

The concept itself is simple: it's kind of a forecast institution for viruses and bacteria, but the form by which you communicate that is relatively new and unheard of and I think in some ways the objects act somehow as a placebo because they are a way for the government to express to you that they are actively doing something for your health; it's a bit like the policeman in the street just walking the pavement: a statement that they are working for your safety.

You could definitely argue that this is a kind of enhanced version of the Big Brother where it would be in your advantage to be within this system - the best way for Big Brother to be around us is for us to want it-, that's how you can see this more as a symbiosis where the state is taking informations about you but in exchange they are providing more health, maybe guaranteeing more health.



Mikael Metthey - Raccolta di indizi Organici per rilevare agenti patogeni

Henriette Vittadini: The system of *Pathogen Hunters* is based on a sort of “biological communism” in which each organic detail of every individual is taken and analyzed from a central organization, responsible for storing and exploiting this information for computing statistics and predictions to be then divulged through public bulletins. This implies a progressive integration of the individuals into symbiosis with a state-directed body, a thing that in the kind of future imagined here would be necessary and desirable. So in this perspective the control of the pathogen agents performed through this “preventive body inquiring”, sounds a bit like a control over the individuals.

Mikael Metthey: Totally! The UK has the biggest bank of DNA in the world and is actively collecting DNA of individuals for legal purposes. They are tailoring surveillance to be even more close to the individuals they are looking after or for; so creating this surveillance, system that is in your

advantage, creates this strange relationship where you need the government to be there. You can choose to opt out but then you will lose your privileges. We were trying to give supporting aspects to the system, whereas they would truly be engaged in trying to make society better and aware of the risks of living in high density. But as in many of my works, it is up to the visitor to interpret the project in an optimistic or pessimistic way.

Henriette Vittadini: How do you approach a new project ?

Mikael Metthey: I like to start for example from an interesting piece of statistic or a fact I haven't come across before and I want to know more about. This is the case for the chickenpox project where before coming to the UK I had never heard of chickenpox parties and as I did I thought that this was the weirdest behavior I'd ever heard of and that kind of commanded a reaction. So it basically works that I make a discovery, something that really grabs me and then I make a response to it and I tend to add layers of technology to either tangibilize it or to put something really light touched in it, depending on the project.

And then I don't want to come forward shouting my opinion as loud as I can, I like people to make their

own opinions about things, I don't pretend to know what's right or wrong. The way in which I produce is that I want to absorb things, understand things and I want to be able to translate them in a new way. I don't really set out to be grotesque or burlesque or irrational; I try to surprise people with what they already know, giving it into a form that they haven't seen before. I am really happy about my projects when I can see that I have kind of educated someone in a new perspective and I learn something from the project too.



Mikael Metthey - The Monster under the bed

Henriette Vittadini: Are you currently working on a new project and/or is there something about which you would like to work ?

Mikael Metthey: There are a few projects that are quite interesting to me at the moment which are about the advance of biotechnology and the way we relate to our fragility. For example talking about regenerative medicine and on how maybe in the future you could lose an arm and you

wouldn't be too bothered about it because you would know you could re-grow it and how is that going to influence our behaviors with our own bodies and the risks we're prepared to take for example performing dangerous tasks since we do not see the danger in the same way we did before we had these kind of 'spare parts'.

Another more down-to-earth project would be the exploration of the ethics of telepresence: the way American troops have been bombing Iraq with remotely controlled planes, the way in which American pilots are controlling planes from Las Vegas and bombing in Iraq, and the extremely curious case of a soldier that wakes up in the morning, brushes his teeth, say bye to his children and goes to work, which is to do acts for the safety of his country, to do these terrible things.

Then he goes home to his wife and children and has dinner and watches TV as if nothing happened, because telepresence can detach you from the reality of the situation, which is that you are bombing people. So I'm interested in this emotional relationship between the person who controls the machine and the machine that performs these really dark purposes.

<http://www.interaction.rca.ac.uk:8080/people/alumni/05-07/mikae-metthey.html>

<http://www.anevolvingcreation.net/>

<http://hstrial-swedishameric.intuitwebsites.com>

<http://impact-art.ning.com>

<http://www.nietnormaal.nl/>

Nueue Musik In Milan. The Rai's Institute Of Phonology Memory

Matteo Milani



Studio di Fonologia - Castello Sforzesco Milano - Variable Pass-Band Filter

“The Institute of Musical Phonology is the outcome of the matching between music and the possible new means of analyzing and processing that sound has” – Luciano Berio

After more than fifty years from the birth of analog magnetic bands music recording, on the 17th of September 2008 at the Castello Sforzesco Museum of Music Instruments in Milan, a new space dedicated to Rai's Institute of Musical Phonology was inaugurated, “musical instrument of the XXth Century, extension of human thought”. Such event was made possible thank to International Music festival MITO, in collaboration with the Civic Museum of Musical Instruments, TV Production Centre and Direzione Radio RAI.

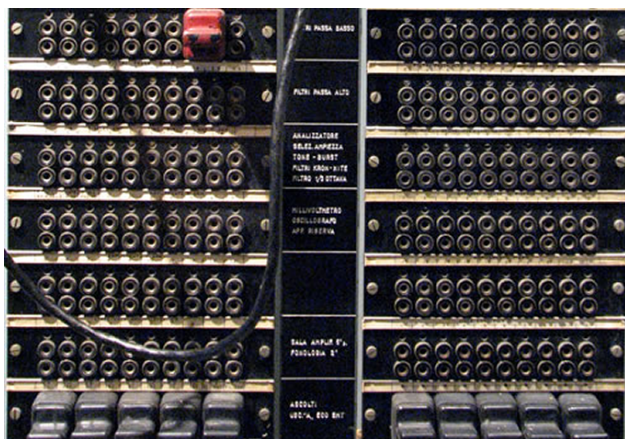
RAI Radiophonic Production's musical consultant and responsible for the Phonology archive, Maddalena Novati, thank to the decisive contribution from Doctor Massimo Ferrario, Director of RAI TV Production Centre (Milan), achieved to transfer all the

Studio equipment from Rai Torino to Milan headquarters. This is the very first plan of recovery, storing and refurbishing electrophonic musical instruments.

Maddalena Novati does in fact describe this niche of the Museum as the “XXth Century lute shop”. The idea of conceiving this space as a sole instrument in its whole, is moving: there are so many experiences enclosed in those devices that it is actually still possible to perceive the residual energy that characterized the entire handcraft process of sound-writing. The Milan Institute of Musical Phonology from RAI headquarter in Corso Sempione 27, designed by physician Alfredo Lietti, was created in June 1955 subsequent to Luciano Berio and Bruno Maderna's initiative.

During that year Milan was of the verge of becoming a pivotal point in international electroacoustic music post-war scene, through a new expressive language, synthesis of the concrete and electronic experiences happening in Europe at the Studio für Elektronische Musik (WDR) in Colonia e the Groupe de Recherches Musicales (GRM) in Paris. Among the electronic music experimental productions at the Bureau of Phonology, must be cited works as Visage by Luciano Berio, Notturmo by Bruno Maderna, Fontana Mix by John Cage and Omaggio ad Emilio Vedova,

the only one work being entirely electronic, realized by Luigi Nono.



Studio di Fonologia - Castello Sforzesco Milano - PatchBay

“...in the opaque Milan of the '50s, Berio and Maderna found a hostile, apathetic environment, opening the Phonology Studio. In complete different situation from the newborn Bureau in Colonia, the two masters, built their ideas on the strong basis of their French experiences through a different technical method which was free and imaginative. Creatively, it has been the most relevant experience in the Whole Old continent ” - Giacomo Manzoni

I always close my eyes and try to jump backwards in time, inside that Studio, imagining the noises, dialogues and sounds coming out the loudspeakers: living and breathing the miracles happening in that far epoch. We now have the possibility to touch by hand what I was always used to see only in photographs and videos, they way many protagonists of that time have lived (eminent musicians like Luigi Nono, Giacomo Manzoni, Aldo

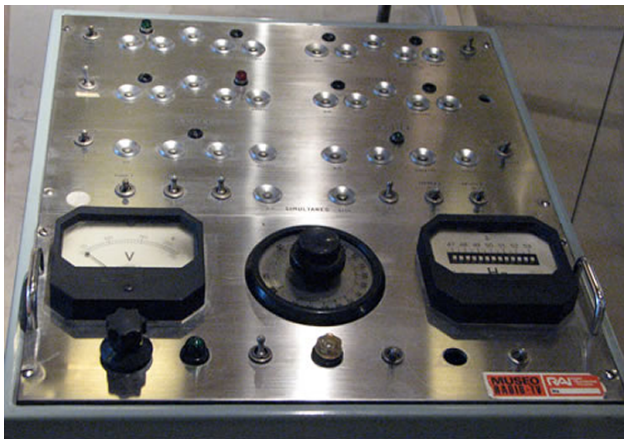
Clementi, Henri Pousseur, John Cage).

In fact, in room XXXVI of the Museum of Music instruments, thank to the “casetta”, a glass structure designed by the architect Michele De Lucchi the rear sides of the eight famous weaving machines containing the circuits are opened so that everyone can enjoy entering the heart of those analog technologies with a 360° vision. On the basis of that time’s original pictures and videos , the atmosphere of those years has been re-enacted.

Further informations about sounds that characterized the second half of the past century, are available to the public of devotees and researchers, thank to four informatics sites, a digital library full of photographs, footage, sound examples and scores (cured by the LIM Laboratory of Università Statale di Milano).

The Studio, a technologic patrimony fundamental for the understanding of electroacoustic music writing, during its beginning period has been experienced by the composers as a mean to emancipate from traditional instruments, with its 9 oscillators, the noise generators, different modulators, filters and the Tempophon (a device with rotating heads that allowed to vary the duration of the reproduction of a previously recorded sound,

maintaining the original pitch).



Those were the times of whitecoated technicians, yet one particular person changed this kind of professional type: Marino Zuccheri. Born on the 28th of February 1923, he was hired by EIAR in 1942; in the following year he left his job because of the war, but was re-hired some years later from the new RAI organization.

“...I like remembering Marino in his Phonology Studio, master among masters, master of sound among masters of music, because sound for him did not have any secrets, since he practiced in auditoriums working for the Radio together with the most famous directors of that time. He would always recall how he began working in Phonology by chance, but it is certain that it wasn't because of chance that he continued during the years, considering he's been the only holder of the Studio from when it was created (1955) until it closed down (1983). Giovanni Belletti, “Marino Zuccheri in Fonologia”, 2008

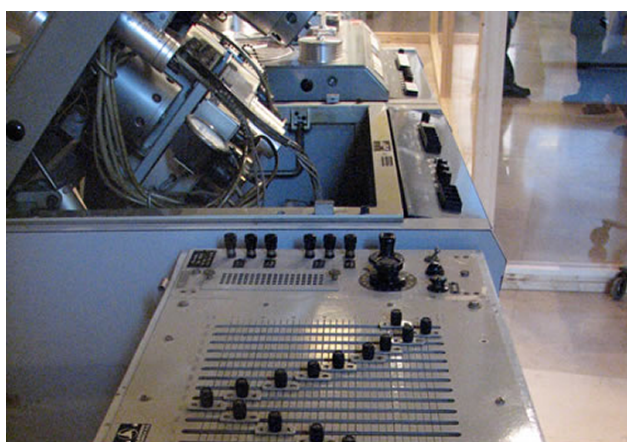
He did not have any obligation to give advice, contributions or suggestions, yet musicians would follow his instructions on how to realize musical compositions: a large stake of past century music would have never come to light.

“...All the protagonists of Neue Musik used to pass by there and it is fair to recall that, since many of them were in Milan to study with scholarships and had to present a complete composition at the end of their term, and the period had not been long enough to master all nine oscillators secrets, great Marino Zuccheri would put together an acceptable composition with a couple of moves, thus many of electronic music incunabula are his and not from those authors who signed them.” – Umberto Eco, La Repubblica, 29 ottobre 2008

That has been an amazing adventure for many years, until 1983 to be precise, year of his retirement (Zuccheri then passed away in Milan, 10th of March 2005).

Martino Zuccheri's demise was a great loss, not only for what he has meant for Contemporary Music, but moreover for what he still could have done: be involved, by RAI, in some important project of tapes cataloging (his own definition) that would have given us fundamental technical, artistic, musical and cultural

informations on the chronicle of that adventure (another his own definition) to restore not that much the sound itself (operation that can, when needed, be made by others) but rather of the ideas and technical intuitions that made possible to create that sound: Marino (and his composers) was the only one that could help us!" Giovanni Belletti, "Marino Zuccheri in Fonologia", 2008



Studio di Fonologia - Castello Sforzesco Milano - Filter

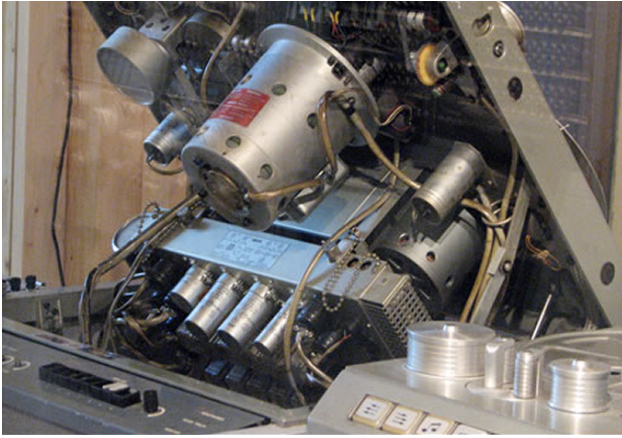
After the Studio closed down, the equipments were disassembled and exhibited in Venice for a short period, on the occasion of *Nuova Atlantide*, organized in 1986 by Biennale (with the collaboration of Roberto Doati and Alvis Vidolin) temporary exhibition, and in Milan for *I piaceri della città - Iconografia delle sensazioni urbane in 2001*, where *Il risveglio di una città* was displayed through music thank to the homonymous futurist composition by Luigi Russolo and to *Ritratto di città*, the first electroacoustic composition of the Fifties (voice and tapes by

Luciano Berio and Bruno Maderna, lyrics by Roberto Levdi) realized in order to convince RAI direction to re-open the Studio.

At the end of the Eighties there still was no awareness of what the phonology studio had meant historically, at the point that all the documentations have been deposited (packed and cataloged) in a storage room at the RAI Museo della Radio in Turin, together with all sorts of disused equipment such as videocameras, recorders, vinyl players, microphones, with no plans to be restored or rebuilt.

Thank to Maddalena Novati's interest, in 1996 the Studio devices were exposed in Turin's Music Salon and in 2003 they were brought back to RAI in Milan and located in a room on the fifth floor which is adjacent to the one where originally the Phonology Studio was. On June 20 2008 they were officially introduced inside the Castello Sforzesco.

It hence has been a true pleasure for me to interview Maddalena Novati herself to talk about what the unique experience of the Milan Institute of Musical Phonology was and meant, and to understand what consequences and developments this process of recovery could lead to.



Studio di Fonologia - Castello Sforzesco Milano - Tape Recorder

Matteo Milani: Maddalena Novati, why in your opinion did the Studio become a myth?

Maddalena Novati: In 1955 to own 9 oscillators tuned on different frequencies, making the comparison with single one there was in Colonia, was like having a “whole orchestra” at your disposal, that could generate many sounds simultaneously as in a chord. So you had already a handful, a palette of sounds that killed production times. Ear was the only judge deciding whether a sound some sound was good or not, after several attempts and mistakes, interesting tapes would be recorded and stored and such process would continue until a result was achieved.

Berio would broadcast on radio each new composition from other Bureaus around Europe in order to spread the repertoire. The 11 TV episodes of *C'è Musica e Musica* (1972) on history and ways of making music, sound fascinating when explained by Luciano. He was a great teacher on

the top of being a great composer, a person that could communicate and bring music to large audiences.

Berio developed an intense activity as a teacher in United States and Europe, offering courses of composition in Tanglewood (1960 and '62), in Dartington Summer School (1961 and '62) in Mills College in California (1962 and '63) in Darmstadt, Colonia, Harvard University and, from 1965 to '72, in Juilliard School of Music in New York. From 1974 to '79 he collaborated with IRCAM in Paris. Berio's “Un ricordo al futuro – Lezioni americane” published by Einaudi is a beautiful book, with the lectures on aesthetics he gave in the US.

Matteo Milani: And when Phonology's decadence period began, instead?

Maddalena Novati: After the Sixties, at the beginning of the Seventies, radio is not anymore the core of research (not being an experimental mean anymore). Computers come up and research centers move elsewhere: large calculators are owned by universities and the musician is depending on physics and science departments. The computing machines had to be functioning day and night and only when physicists would leave their workplace, musicians could take their place during nights for performing calculations for their compositions.

The radio was not anymore involved about all of this as the broadcasting media did not yet make use of computers and the respective courses were different, Without updating anymore its equipments and without a technological update, the Phonology Study was less and less attended by composers. Moreover the defection of some big names (Berio moved to the IRCAM of Paris, Luigi Nono to Fribourg, Maderna passed away prematurely in 1973) had an influence on an inevitable decline



Studio di Fonologia - Castello Sforzesco Milano

ACTIVE CONSERVATION

It's again Maddalena Novati telling us that today the archives (original master copies) of Phonology hold 391 audio tapes of 1/4 inches with one or two tracks and one inch tapes with one or two tracks as well as one inch tapes with four tracks, plus 232 digital copies from acquisitions (copies of works coming from other studios, centers for electronic music, recording or concerts or plays of the main authors and interpreters who

frequented the Studio during its activity years). Since 1995 the custody of tapes continues to be her primary objective as well as their cataloguing and digitalization in cooperation with Casa Ricordi (the oldest and most important Italian editor), together with the central Nastroteca of RAI and Mirage laboratory of Gorizia University.

No real decay of the tapes has occurred thanks to the good quality of the material supports from BASF that were selected instead of other brands like Scotch or Agfa. Survival of the audio documents is possible only by separating them from their physical support and periodically transferring them to new supports. The second digital transfer at 96 khz/24 bit is currently ongoing at the Centro di Produzione TV and Produzione Radiofonia of Rai Milano, in cooperation with Mirage laboratory

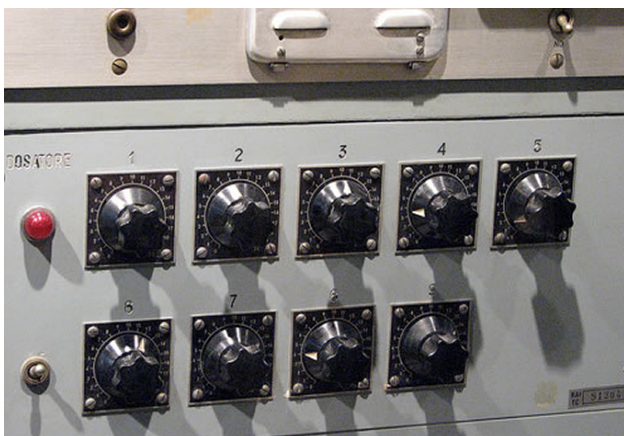
RESTORATION OF RECORDED MUSIC

As to the restoration, the most common task is elimination of noise of the analogic tapes and, according to the tape conditions and the specific nature of the music, there are other interventions to be decided on a case by case basis. As a start, one has to perform an initial search for detecting the possible existence of other copies of the same music as it would then be possible to exploit the best parts from

each copy and with suitable techniques improve the efficacy of the cleaning work.

In many works of electronic music the original tape contains scratches and joints glued with adhesive tape whose glue loses in few years its adhesive properties. Therefore it often happens that one has to paste various pieces of tape before copying it on a new support. On some tapes it happens that there are some detached magnetic fragments, on some others, parts of material or protective film might have melted and hence deposit on the sound head blocking the progress of the tape.

On top of these mechanical problems there might occur electromagnetic problems or problems due to the type of equalization used in the recording step and the fact that the oldest tapes could support a proportionally lesser quantity of magnetization.



Studio di Fonologia - Castello Sforzesco Milano - Nine Input Mixer

RECONSTRUCTING THE LABORATORIES

As I already had the chance of evidencing it, very often the production of electronic music is not linked to a specific instrument like the traditional one but rather to a whole of equipments commonly termed as system. Hence the conservation of a single element of a system does not give a full testimony of the operating mode of a musician in a given period. Without doubt the most efficacious solution is that of reconstructing a lab where one can reproduce all the phases of the production process of a musical work. In Cologne for instance they reconstructed and brought back to function a lab for electronic music in the same configuration of the fifties.

In a similar way they are operating at the Aja museum as to the study of Sonology Institute of Utrecht University in the sixties. In Paris at the Parc de la Villette they are setting up a large section dedicated to the musical electrophonic instruments up to the experiences of computer music in real time of the eighties [Vidolin A., "Conservazione e restauro dei beni musicali elettronici", in *Le fonti musicali in Italia - Studi e Ricerche*, CIDIM, year 6, pp. 151-168, 1992].

<http://www.milanocastello.it>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/graph>

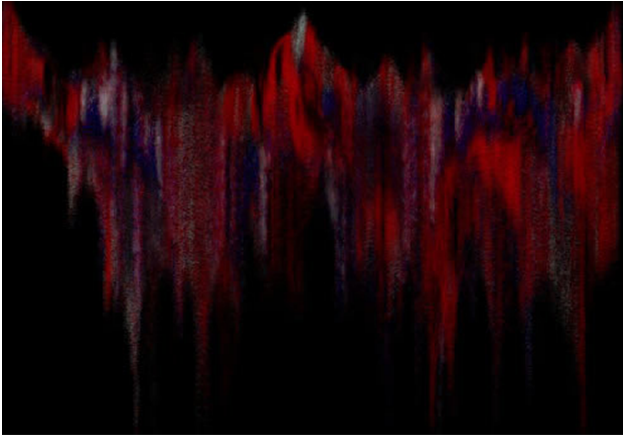
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<http://www.mitosettembremusica.it>

<http://www.musimac.it/speciali/eventi/studio-fonologia>

Deep Ambiguity. A Conversation With Ben Houge

Robin Peckham



Ben Houge - 29 Giraffes

Ben Houge is a composer and sound designer who, though trained in composition, has largely been employed in sound design for video games, for at least five years at the corporate Ubisoft (in addition to collaborations with Gearbox Software, Troika Games, Massive Entertainment, Escape Factory, Relic Entertainment and ArenaNet). In Shanghai, however, he is known as one of the few outsiders to truly penetrate local art and music cultures.

His major installations and performances have been included in the Shanghai eArts Festival, Waterland Kwanyin, 2Pi Festival, and Fat Art. Beyond his participation in many of the major new media art and music festivals that occur throughout China, he is increasingly known as one

of the more theoretically-attuned members of this community. In a series of visits in Beijing, Hong Kong, and Shanghai, we sat down to flesh out some of the major issues facing his work in China today, including interactivity, mapping, composition, and gaming. Houge is currently participating in an artist residency at the True Color Museum in Suzhou, where he will be organizing a series of concerts and events assessing the state of the experimental music landscape in eastern China.

Ben Houge has written copious amounts of traditional linear music, pop music, soundtracks, music for string quartets, choral music, and so on, and is currently working on a pop music album with a built n-ary algorithm, pursuing what he considers his mission: to explore nonlinear structures of the sound. In this sense, Houge enjoys recalling the development of several interesting solutions to the issue of non-linear sound in video games; his most recent work in that field, *Tom Clancy's EndWar*, has an ingenious music system that combines linear sentences in random permutations

and multiple layers.

In short, Ben Houge is a multifaceted character, difficult to classify through the many applications of his vast sound and music creativity. The following text is an abridged version of a very long discussion that took place in person and by e-mail between September 2009 and April 2010.



Ben Houge

Robin Peckham: I had the pleasure to hear your piece *Radiospace* at Dos Kolegas in Beijing during one of the regular Waterland Kwanyin nights curated by Yan Jun, and I'm listening to a recorded version now. I like the way you're absorbing cultural information—the less-than-interesting material floating around Chinese F.M. airwaves—and then processing it in a way that seems relatively anti-humanist. What's the relationship between material and algorithm for you? You've said that during the live version you act as the algorithm. To what extent do you mean that the algorithmic processing becomes

humanized, and to what extent do you mean you function mechanically? How much randomness is involved in the live piece?

Ben Houge: I would say that of all my pieces, *Radiospace* is probably the one that gives me the most continued pleasure to listen to, and I think one reason is exactly what you touched on, the relationship between material and algorithm. Much of my work is focused on the algorithm, because that's where I think there's so much interesting work to be done. In this piece, the material is secondary (although I've noticed the input doesn't vary as much as I originally supposed, as radio is actually pretty homogenous, usually mainstream popular music or people talking), and because of the constantly changing input and algorithmic behavior, it's still capable of surprising and delighting me.

There's a lot to this. I've certainly written plenty of traditional linear music, pop songs, soundtracks, music for string quartet, choral music, etc., and there's of course so much you can do with the elements of traditional linear music, so I don't want to say that I'm tired of melody or anything like that. I'm working on an album of pop songs now, in fact, with nary an algorithm in sight. But I guess this gets back to my aforementioned "mission"—I really do consider it that-to

explore non-linear structures in sound. There have been a lot of interesting solutions to structuring non-linear sound in games, and I think the last game I did, *Tom Clancy's EndWar*, has a pretty clever music system, which combined linear phrases in random permutations and multiple layers.

The first observation is that a loop is the least imaginative solution to a very interesting problem, which is how to make sound continue indefinitely. And here it's not some abstract, avant-garde concern from the 1950s; it's an absolutely practical necessity, since games are an inherently non-linear medium, and you never know how long a player will take to finish a certain level. The solution needs to be considered anew for each game in the same way that, in effect, every time you make a game (or at least a game engine, which indicates a set of preconceptions about what kind of game you're making), it's like inventing a new movie camera each time you want to shoot a movie.



Ben Hogue

So I've scoured John Cage and Earle Brown and Christian Wolff and Morton Feldman, as well as Stockhausen and Lutoslawski, for techniques that can be reappropriated for videogame soundtracks, and I'm also interested in completing the loop (so to speak) by taking some of these ideas that have found practical application in games and turn them back into pure music. I've never tried to compile some kind compendium of non-linear precepts, but I think I am developing something of a personal vocabulary. I've come to think of linearity as a scale from non- to very, rather than a binary thing; it's almost like meta data for traditional linear music.

Granularity might be a more appropriate term, defining the seams in the music, to decide when it can change and how. I wrote one piece a few years back with the goal of being completely non-linear (an acoustic piece for piano, soprano, flute, and cello), and having done that once, now I'm much more interested in

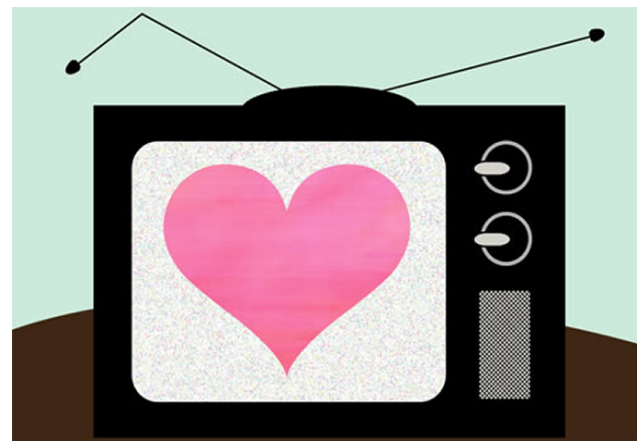
finding the sweet spot between non-linear behaviors and linear behaviors, whatever that may mean for a given piece.

Some people seem to think an aleatory composer bows down to random numbers in some kind of blasphemous way, but it's always a continuum; there are an infinitude of ways to make something out of random numbers (and actually randomness itself is already somewhat limiting; I'm more drawn to stochastic or statistical behaviors in a lot of cases, not true randomness, but it's an easy catch-all term). The artist has to decide where the randomness goes, and how it's configured.

So if you're writing phrases of traditional linear music, and you're searching for the best sequence, as John Cage said, "instead of choosing just one solution, we use them all!" I really think in terms of Calder mobiles (drawing the most from Earle Brown, who was also a big Calder fan), where the individual elements are fixed, but the configuration is constantly changing.

There are lots of aesthetic or even philosophical stances one can take on this point. For Cage, it was a Zen thing, this idea of non-intention, the idea of accepting whatever happens, and this is where I diverge from him, although of course he remains a huge

influence. What I'm often trying to do is more deterministic: to create an environment in which the most fruitful results are most likely to occur. I consider composition to be the establishing of this domain, and my work encompasses all possibilities of the system. (This is really just as true of a traditional musical score; there are an infinitude of interpretations for a *molto rubato* expression marking or whatever, but it's still considered to be the same piece. This gets back to the idea of a spectrum of non-linearity; all music is non-linear to some extent.)



Ben Houge & 99 Men - 3 Heart-Shaped Cookies Cover Ep (2008)

Robin Peckham: There is a certain unintelligible "background" sound to this piece *Radiospace* that seems somewhat removed from the radio material. Technically, where does this come from? Do you want to keep a distance from pure noise? Your work seems much less physically impressing than many other artists, including those you played with the night I saw in Beijing. Do you see this

kind of work as functioning more cognitively?

Ben Houge: It's actually all the same thing. There are two fundamental behaviors in the piece. One is the high level chunks that get repeated at irregular intervals. The idea is that it kind of takes something that might go ignored and insistently draw your attention to it, and then put it up against something unexpected. There's a great little phrase that happens in the *Hotel California* section of that rendering, where the boring old chords of that song are suddenly jostled into a weird little progression; that's the kind of thing I love. The other behavior is actually still the same thing, but with much smaller chunks of sound, a fairly basic implementation of a technique called granular synthesis (see Curtis Roads, *Microsound*).

Both behaviors are drawing from the same set of six 10-second buffers that are randomly replenished at regular intervals (allowing for a kind of mid-level referential coherence), but in the second behavior, little chunks are kind of sandblasted into the speakers with much greater density. I have a drunk/random walk reading through a bunch of tables to determine the position in the buffer, density, volume, all kinds of parameters, and the tables are hand-drawn, to give it a bit of human touch.

What I love about this is that it turns melody into harmony, kind of freeze-framing chunks of the original recording and turning them into these hovering clouds that still vaguely evoke the original source. A lot of these pieces are trying to get people to hear common or ordinary sounds in new ways through unexpected juxtapositions.

Pure noise as an end unto itself doesn't really interest me that much, though as I said, that's the crowd I've kind of fallen in with here in Shanghai. I view noise as an acoustic element like any other. And really pure noise just means a chaotic collection of pitches, like a string of random numbers in a computer system. Once you start to color the noise (even changing the sampling rate in a computer), attenuate it, structure it, you're using the same tools that any other musician uses. Noise artists are really just musicians like anyone else, but with an aggressive veneer (but don't tell them I said so).

I think a good piece should have some kind of visceral attraction as well as functioning cognitively, and I do try to make an effort to keep my shows from being just some dude behind a laptop who might as well be playing a 45-minute MP3. With a few pieces I try to tackle this by making it clear that all of the material for the piece is being recorded live on stage. That's

true of my pieces *Psalmus* and *A Reading from _____*, maybe less true of *Radiospace*, although I'm trying to make it clear that I'm tuning a radio on stage as part of the piece. But, yeah, lack of physicality can be a problem for laptop-based performance, and that's one reason I'm getting into Jitter and graphics, to try to give folks something to watch.



Ben Houge - Study for Insomnia

This is not only true of the performative aspect of what I'm doing. A good piece should fire on all cylinders, cognitively, structurally, viscerally, philosophically, contextually. You should feel an attraction, and it should hold your attention as you dig deeper. But of course what constitutes "attraction" and "attention" can vary significantly from piece to piece. Some pieces are small, with modest aspirations, but they can do what they're designed to do very effectively. Attraction is a function of the context people bring to your work, and as such it can't be universal. Nothing happens in a

vacuum, but these are the issues of audience that any artist deals with.

I always come back to the Brian Eno quote, that he's after a music that is "as ignorable as it is interesting." I'm not so interested in aggressively beating people over the head with stuff. One thing I learned from a friend of mine in Seattle with whom I collaborated on a bunch of projects, Korby Sears, was the importance of empathy; you've got to give people a reason to listen, since especially with the glut of media available these days, if they don't care, they'll just tune you out.

That said, non-aggression has its limits! After doing an ambient laptop set at the Creek Art Center in Shanghai in December 2009 for a very chatty crowd (during which some nitwit actually tried to do a little networking, asking if I'd like to be involved with some future project; if he demonstrates such blatant unawareness and disrespect for what I'm doing, I'm absolutely not interested), I've decided I'm done doing ambient sets in clubs. My last show at [storied indie rock venue] D-22 in Beijing suffered some of the same problems.



Ben Hogue - Recordings Source Material for Lu Kou (Shanghai)

Robin Peckham: In *Radiospace* and in several other pieces you're using "found" sound, but it's far from a field recording, partially because your found material is inaudible to human ears—without the mediation of the radio device. Is this a translation of some kind? Or more of a slippage between different registers of intelligibility?

Ben Hogue: Yeah, I think, along the lines of your algorithm/material issue, the found sound itself, while sometimes quite beautiful in its untouched form, is often less interesting (to me) than what you do with it. I'm getting to be of the opinion that art lives in the transitions; it's like the derivative of sound, or maybe the Rauschenberg idea of taking something and doing something to it and doing something to it again. There's definitely a translation going on. If I had to say in one word what digital art was about, I'd say mapping. You've always got inputs and outputs, and meaning

comes from how you put things together.

If you're not careful about what you're doing, it'll be the equivalent of playing a word document as a wave file, just garbage coming out; that kind of digital art's very easy, and usually extremely blunt. Meaning is in the mapping. Or as with the Calder idea earlier, it's in the hinges, how things are connected. And I think a lot of these mappings happen as a continuum, not a discrete thing, so there's a spectrum of intelligibility, a spectrum of linearity, a spectrum of indeterminacy, a spectrum of interactivity.

Interactivity is another area where videogames seem way ahead of most installations I've seen. Most installations take the refrigerator door approach to interactivity: open the door and the light comes on. Once you figure it out, there's no reason to keep engaging with the piece; there's none of the ambiguity that keeps you coming back to a masterpiece for fresh perspectives.

Robin Peckham: You insist that artists working with a specific scene or medium should really explore the consequences and foundations of what they're doing: an artist working with video games should know more about the design process rather than just the aesthetics, and so on. On the

contrary, I'd argue that the artist must be a dilettante, because once he understands the mind of an engineer he's no longer working critically with the medium. It seems to me that your artwork is so rich precisely because you come at it from composition and game design angles; it's a question of diverse and critically situated voices. Your work is not art-historical in the dry way that I think your theory would call for.

Ben Houge: I've had this discussion with a lot of people in recent months. A good friend of mine and an artist from Seattle whom I respect a great deal, Mike Min, responded to my "you gotta know your materials" line by saying he didn't agree at all, which has caused me to reconsider a bit. One of my touchstones on this topic is Ravel, not only a master composer, but a master orchestrator. There's a bit in Bolero where he doubles a piccolo with, if memory serves, a horn at an interval of an octave or two plus a fifth.

It's a really clever trick, showing an awareness of musical physics, since the piccolo reinforces the upper partials of the horn to change the timbre; it doesn't sound like parallel fifths, but like a new, fused instrument. I think he arrived at this innovation because of his longstanding engagement with the orchestral medium, and he was able

to apply his compositional insight to every parameter of the piece, including timbre (orchestration).

On the other hand, it's common practice for film composers to outsource the orchestration of their scores to someone else. Of course there are practical reasons for this, the composer being almost the last stage in the film production pipeline with a tight deadline, but this nonetheless abdicates responsibility of an important compositional parameter. Ravel's music wouldn't be the same—he wouldn't have made the breakthroughs in orchestration that he made—if he had hired someone else to do it.

I think the same thing is true of electronic music. You can write a piece and hire someone else to do the technical part, but in doing so, you miss a chance to integrate the electronic realization into the composition itself (as Stockhausen said, "In everything, I want to integrate more and more").



Ben Houge & 99 Men - 3 Heart-Shaped Cookies Back Cover

So as precedent for my argument, I cite Ravel and early Stockhausen; you simply have to control everything to achieve that kind of integration, which leads to innovation.

But of course, there's only one way to get to know your materials, and that's to start from zero and learn them. An artist working in another medium may have a leg up on learning a new one, but she or he still has to do the work. I think a good example of this is John Cage; his visual pieces perfectly embody his aesthetic in a different medium (ok, I'll admit that his guru-status kind of precludes him from wrongdoing in this regard).

As a bad example, I often come back to this horrendous Tan Dun installation I saw at Shanghai Gallery of Art a few years back. He had disassembled a bunch of pianos and made some very amateur videos and managed to fill up a room with this junk. It betrayed a kind of complacency that suggested he didn't need to come to terms with a new medium, since he was a recognized master in another.

One key to this discussion comes from a conversation I had with a teacher while working on my master's degree, Richard Karpen. I made some kind of comment (probably some kind of justification) about a piece being "experimental," and he responded,

"Ok, but what kind of experiment is it? Is it a junior high school science experiment that is done primarily for the benefit of the student, or is it something that actually contributes something of value to a greater community?"

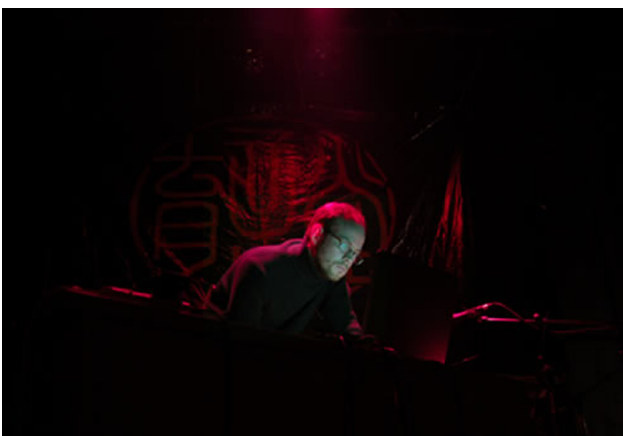
I've been very conscious of this question as I've been branching out from sound into image-making and video. You save your early experiments for your own edification and build on them, and then only when you've done as much as you can on your own, you share with a wider audience, at which point you can benefit from the audience's feedback.

The same professor pointed out that composition and programming were kind of the same thing. It's not like you write the music, and then add the technical part. Programming, like composition, is about structure. Knowing programming allows you to explore new kinds of organizational (i.e., compositional) structures in a way that you can't really do if you can't code, if you're a traditional composer working with a technical assistant.

I do have a tendency to want to do everything myself to ensure control over every aspect of a piece. But I do acknowledge the importance of creative collaboration, especially as pieces get big and complex. It has

been said that the composer who writes his own libretto has a fool for a client, but that didn't stop Wagner and others. I've had successful collaborations when working on complex systems in videogames. I know Max/MSP pretty well, but Max code can't be directly incorporated into game code, which is typically written in C++.

So instead I would often develop prototypes in Max, to work out the problem as best I could on my own, and then present it in detail to a C++ programmer who can basically duplicate the behavior in the game engine, and then we work together to iterate on the behavior and tweak it to get it working right. So even in collaboration with other programmers, you need the ability to think programmatically, to understand what you're asking them to do.



Ben Houge & 99 Men - Premiering Mobile 3 at NoliShanghai VI

I can see why someone might say that it's better to come at a problem free from the burden of history, without

someone telling you how to solve it. It's possible you'll be able to think of some fresh angle or insight that might evade others who are mired in the traditional dialectics associated with the problem. But I think that's rare. More often you're going to waste time learning for yourself the same things that others have learned, time that you might have saved by boning up a bit on the subject in advance.

I remember talking to a guy at a party in Shanghai a few years ago. He said he was starting a game company, and I asked him what his experience was, and he said that they actually didn't have any experience, but they had two guys back in Canada who were learning C++ at that very moment, and that they thought their inexperience would allow them to think outside the box to come up with new, creative ideas, which is about the most foolish thing I've ever heard.

Learn from history or repeat its mistakes, as they say, and starting a game company is a particularly mistake-prone venture. I suppose the more complex a venture is, the greater the possibility of failure. Failing, or going through the process from scratch to arrive at a solution, working it out on your own, is of course a good way (the best way, probably) to learn; you've got to internalize the process, but that doesn't preclude learning from the

experience of others.

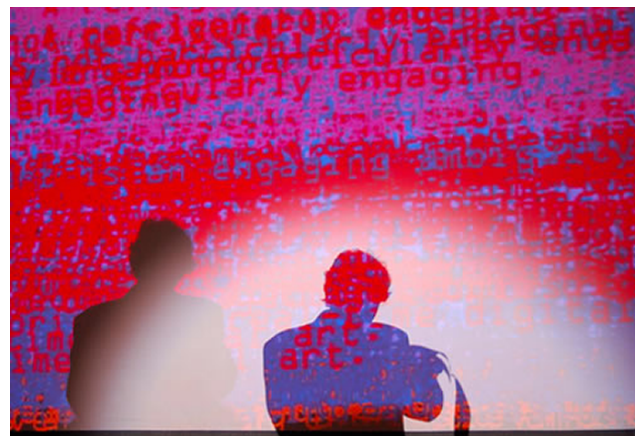
Another example, from the same party, in fact. Some girl asked me about my job, and I started saying why I think videogames are an interesting place to be, since the grammar is still being developed, the terrain is still being charted, how it's less calcified than the filmmaking process, and so on. I brought up the most common challenge for sound, the problem of making something continue indefinitely, until some game state or user input necessitates a change; this is something you can't know this in advance, as games are an inherently indeterminate medium.

Her response was, "Just loop it," which is everyone's first reaction when they don't understand the medium. In a way, I've been fighting against that lowest common denominator, cocktail party response ever since. It's the dumbest response to a very interesting question.

I think I've offended people in the past by stating this point too directly, which is not my intent. I don't mean to suggest that an artist shouldn't venture into a new medium; of course they should, and I'm doing exactly that with my recent video pieces. I think because I've been branching out into visual images, I'm particularly sensitive to this point. You've got to do your homework and know when

you're at a point where your work is ready for a wider audience.

As I've thought about this more recently, I think the prerequisite isn't just a knowledge of a medium, but a mindset that allows an artist to apply expertise in one area to another medium or set of challenges. A good educational background allows you to learn from history while still being critical of it, which strikes me as the ideal stance. It's about knowing how to tackle a new challenge and apply what's relevant from past experience, learning how to learn. I mean, I guess that's life, ideally, of which art is a microcosm.



Ben Houge - Switching to Nature

Robin Peckham: You say you come to art with "few prerequisites," but imply that you do know your medium well. Tell me about your definitions here. To my mind, art is a constellation of practices, conceptual moves, and so on, with an inherited history and theory, that spans a range of media—i.e., painting (which includes watercolor, oil, etc.) or gaming (which

might include machinima, serious games, digital stills, and so on...), but that would be differentiated from music (which includes classical and experimental composition, scoring, and so on) and video games per se. Do you see art as a medium, or do you see media as a component of art?

Ben Houge: Yes, I guess that sounds contradictory. What I mean is that I come to other peoples' art with few prerequisites for what it should be, with few expectations, that I try to appreciate everything on its own terms, to try to judge it against what it set out to do. Shortly out of college, I had a colleague who was dumbfounded that I enjoyed listening to Pierre Boulez as well as Erasure, but I think that while what they're trying to do is very different, they both succeed on their own terms.

I hope this doesn't come off as some kind of cultural relativism. As Ted Hughes said about Sylvia Plath, if she couldn't make a table out of something, at least she could make a sturdy stool. To me the measure of a good artwork is how well it accomplishes what it sets out to do.

So I try not to approach something new with a set of expectations about what it should be. For example, people often say things like "music is about emotion," but I don't think it has to be. I think the only thing music has

to be about is expression of an idea, and it could be any idea (maybe not even a clearly articulated one). So I try not to get caught up in discussions of what's music or what's sound or what's art. If you say it's art, sure, why not? I'll give it a go. Then what follows is the much more fruitful discussion of what's good art and what's bad art.

So anyway, I'd definitely say I see media as a component of art. Art is the idea, and the medium is the means by which it is transmitted. Art is about expressing an idea (maybe not even communicating, I suppose; this gets to the question of audience and context; it is possible to define an artwork whose only audience is the artist). For me, increasingly, my personal practice of art is about structure, and structure, more readily than any other parameter of music, can be media-independent.

And as I've been involved in non-linear structure, these questions have come to the fore, and I think it's natural for me to try my ideas out in different media. (For example, see the *Study for Insomnia* video that I recently posted to my blog.)



Ben Houge - Transportation

Robin Peckham: I would give art labeled as new media a little more wiggle room here, because I believe this category should be about interrogating the medium itself—which is not to say that all artists working with electronic or digital media should fall under this rubric, but I believe that “new media” as a practice can only be a subcategory of this project. Artists should understand more than the “sheen” or “nostalgia,” but I have no problem with them starting from these points and moving more deeply into gaming cultures. Perfect example: Cory Arcangel’s clouds. This functions very well for me, the way he moves from a totally aesthetic in-joke to the notion of altering a physical computing system

Ben Houge: I use “new media” as a term of necessity. I used it when touring the last eArts exhibition at the Oriental Pearl Tower with a visiting French curator, and she started to take me to task for using it. When I use it as a term of convenience, I

basically mean “we’ll think of a better word for this later,” since all media was new at some point.

Shouldn’t part of working in any medium be about interrogating the medium? It seems to me that should be an intrinsic part of working with any medium, seeing what you can say with it, finding out what it’s good for, and usually then staking out an area of it that’s well suited for the kinds of ideas you’re trying to express (and I acknowledge that I’ve staked out a relatively small subsection of the digital landscape to explore in depth).

Isn’t that happening with sculpture? I can’t say I have my finger on the pulse of sculpture, but when I see collections of recent sculptural work, it seems the medium is constantly being interrogated, as people are asking what is sculpture, what is its relevance today, and pushing the medium to expand to encompass increasingly large scale installation work (at least from some recent surveys I’ve seen).

But I suppose there’s maybe more of an emphasis on this in “new media,” as people are still coming to terms with the medium, and I guess that’s why I’m attracted to games, and digital art in general. It’s unstable in a way, more generally unknown. The grammar is still being figured out.

Your question seems to presuppose a certain relationship between art and culture, like artists are exploring “gaming culture” from the outside. I’m a little sensitive on this point, having heard lots of artist refer to “game art,” as though the artists were coming to games as the saviors who would elevate the medium to art, which strikes me as kind of condescending, especially when a lot of the people who like to talk about “game art” don’t seem interested in playing games (which I would consider the first step in interrogating the medium). To refer to “game art” suggests that games qua games are not capable of art. To me this is as silly as saying “film art” or “photography art.”

I think there’s a useful distinction to make between art that uses the gaming medium and art that is about the gaming subculture. I’m squarely interested in the former, and I think that’s of primary interest to anyone actually working in the medium (as a game developer or a “game artist”). That’s where these questions of non-linear structure, interactivity, etc., (the interesting questions, to me) are being explored, and these are the questions that differentiate games from other media.

Art about gaming culture (typically nostalgic, including the glut of 8 bit-inspired art) can be made in any medium. It could be a nice film or

print or whatever, but it likely contributes little to our understanding of the inherent qualities of the gaming medium. It’s more of a sociological concern, just like art that explores S&M culture or whatever. It’s the distinction between medium and content.



Ben Houge - Recording Sounds of Kakum Rainforest (Ghana)

I see this same confusion being perpetrated from the other side in these ridiculous *Video Games Live* concerts, as recently featured in the “New York Times”. It’s celebrating the culture of games, but it’s doing nothing to cement their cultural standing. In fact, it’s keeping gaming culture in the cultural ghetto of people who dress up in elf costumes, skirting all the interesting issues of the medium. This gets back to interrogating the medium, which is something that I think I’ve been doing at significant depth for years. These concerts ignore the interesting structural questions that set the videogame medium apart from film, concert music, etc. in favor of smoke

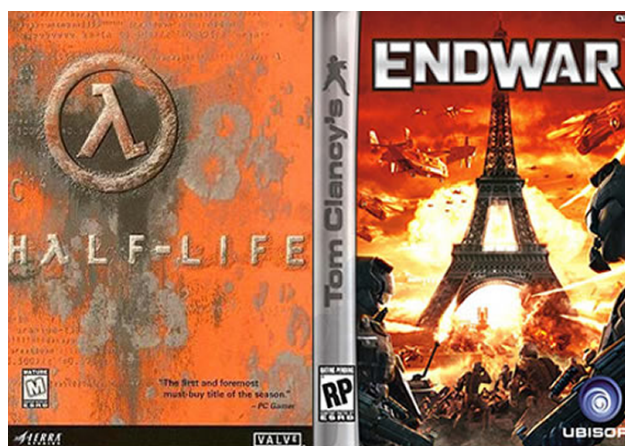
machines and orchestral transcriptions of the “Super Mario Bros.” theme.

Much more relevant would be the symphony project I have planned, in which the music is literally generated in real-time for acoustic musicians to deploy; don’t know when I’m going to get around to that, though. First step is my *Zhujiajiao Drinking Game*, which is a crude real time score for beer bottles, percussion, and audience that I need to find some time to revise one of these days.

In fact, for people working in games, the notion of 8 bit is more of an annoyance than anything, a memory of a frustrating technical limitation. (Although I suppose there may be some interesting math/puzzle solving that’s easier to grok in 8 bits, so it might retain some interest for that quality, the way you might do a crossword puzzle; I’ll grant that lower bit resolution makes information easier for humans to parse and play with). What would it be like maybe talking to painters about the time before acrylic paint? That’s why I don’t really like most 8 bit art, including Cory Arcangel’s clouds. For artists like me who have been grappling with the medium for a long time, 8 bit is a frustrating, obsolete limitation.

I’ve talked to a lot of art-savvy folks who view gaming this way (often

condescendingly or nostalgically), not realizing that they’re looking at only an early foretaste of what games are well on their way to becoming. People think of it as a cultural curiosity, like skateboarding or parcour or whatever. But in 20 years (probably much less) the idea of someone not playing games will be like talking to someone who doesn’t like films or listen to music. It’s not because these people are going to start liking complex joypads and elves and aliens or whatever; rather the medium will have grown to encompass the issues/genres/settings/dialectics that already interest them.



Ben Hough - Half Life & EndWar videogame covers

Robin Peckham: I think it’s important to retain the vocabulary that keeps all these things distinct. Certainly games can be an art form, but I wouldn’t collapse that with either “art games” or “game art,” which both have their own traditions within the contemporary art scene. It is still a meaningful distinction to refer to “film art,” which is distinct from film in

cinema, which is again distinct from the art film. And “photography art” remains different from what they still call “fine art photography.”

The use of a particular medium does not imply that same medium as a conceptual theme, and vice versa. Additionally, I’d like to point out that your critique of the fascination with 8 bit in art implies a certain linear progress with games, and I don’t think that necessarily holds. Similarly, early film still makes a fascinating reference point for both scholars and artists, evaluating a moment at which the development and use of the medium could have moved in a number of different directions.

New media art should never be about simply utilizing the latest and greatest technological marvels; at its best, it questions the cultural basis that informs this continued development, often through outdated technologies or media. But let’s move on to chat about the experimental musician and sound artist Zhou Risheng, just because I know he’s another point of disagreement.

You said previously any work should have a visceral element of attraction and a cognitive element. Tell me where you see Zhou failing here—and because I’m not totally familiar with the technical side, please be specific about how you see his process, and

what makes it boring from your point of view.

Ben Houge: Let me first say that my observations here are based on a fading memory of the one time I’ve seen him perform, so I don’t want to come across as completely anti-Zhou Risheng; I’m sure he’s a great guy. But the performance I saw struck me as pretty weak. It’s hard for me to pinpoint all the issues, so I’ll have to talk around them a bit, I think.

I’d say that a piece has to work on at least one of those levels, cognitive or visceral. Some non-visceral stuff is worth digging for. Actually, if it’s visceral only, I’m not sure that’s enough. I think I usually try to evaluate pieces based on how well they accomplish what they set out to do. But this show I saw had no visceral attraction to me at all; it was a mass of undifferentiated broadband noise, loud, static, and ugly. None of those qualities are necessarily negative, but here they didn’t seem to have a reason.

If something is really loud and monolithic and unchanging noise, it could be working on a conceptual or symbolic level, or it could serve as a counterpoint in a larger sonic structure, or it could be focusing attention on minute, subtly shifting details there are lots of reasons you might want to do this, but I couldn’t

find one at this show.

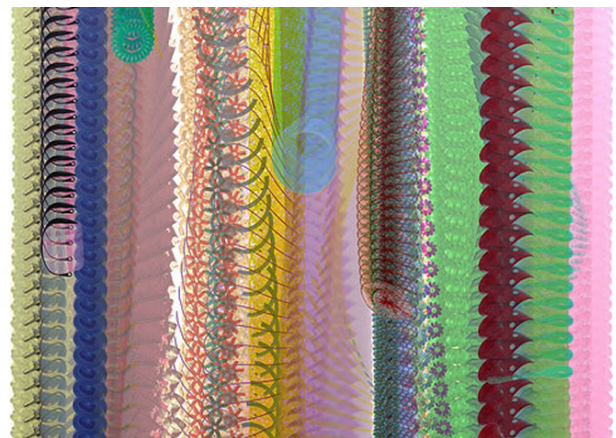
The Shanghai noise band Torturing Nurse has done some stuff that could be described the same way, but their lo-fi approach means that their noise maintains a relationship to human gesture, that the phrasings are based (often) on the length of a human breath or the movement of hands on a guitar or the pounding of fists thwacking on sheet metal or whatever.

In general, their stuff maintains a gestural connection to physical activity, which imbues the sound with small fluctuations that maintain sonic interest, while at the same time keeping your attention with the kind of angsty vestiges of rock band performance practice. It's probably true that I'm easier on Torturing Nurse than on Zhou Risheng, since I know them, I know what they're doing, I respect their community building/concert promotion efforts, and I think they're good guys.

I also have the benefit of a long term perspective on their stuff, and I see how they try out different materials and have gone through different phases, including personnel changes, so I can place things in a larger context. I think the biggest danger for them is when their stuff borders on the theatrical, and that expectation isn't explored. They sometimes have

the same kind of problem that affects Sulumi or iLoop, which is that sometimes the big sounds being produced don't have visual corollary, so they compensate with exaggerated body movement, as if to prove they're really emoting.

This also touches on the idea of sympathy; you've got to give people a reason to pay attention. Torturing Nurse accomplishes this in the short term with the energy and spectacle of their live shows, but also in the long term, through their concert promotion and community building.



Ben Houge - Shanghai Traces

Anyway, back to Zhou Risheng. I actually managed to dig up the notebook into which I scribbled some observations during the show I caught, must have been October 2008, "Waterland Kwanyin" at Dos Kolegas. At the time I was rehearsing with Yan Jun and Bruce Gremo for our show at last year's eArts Festival, and due to the nature of the piece we were doing (Christian Marclay's *Screenplay*), we were talking a lot

about how to map images and sound. Zhou Risheng's performance was kind of doing something similar, but in a very unsophisticated and, I'd say, unsuccessful way.

His Jitter patch was projected on the wall of Dos Kolegas, so everyone could see what he was doing. It looked to me like he had basically taken some Jitter demo patches (Max/MSP/Jitter comes with lots of excellent demo patches and tutorials) and minimally tweaked them to make a lot of noise. It seemed to be largely based on a Jitter demo patch called "jit.forbidden-planet" (the name was visible on the screen), and it seemed pretty clear that the tidy, well-organized bits of the patch were from the original file, with just a few messy bits to show his modifications.

I don't remember very clearly, but I wrote down that he had 3 panes open, and he was drawing or writing in them, and the information from these windows was going to the output. I didn't know Jitter as well then as I do now (which is still not that well), but my impression at the time was that he was taking something that was not designed as an audio signal and sending it to the audio output. In any event, there was no meaningful connection between what he was drawing and what was coming out of the speakers. It also seemed like even though he was projecting

this on a wall, suggesting it to be worthy of the audience's attention, he hadn't done much to make it interesting to look at, and he was switching back and forth between screens, hiding what he was writing, and the menu bar was always visible. So it failed on a visual as well as aural level.

I guess you could say that this is just the spirit of hacking, but I think most hackers would take offense at this allegation. To me, the pride of a hacker is in taking something designed for one purpose, figuring it out, and then cleverly subverting it to do something else. It seemed to me that he hadn't taken that first step of figuring out what the original system was doing, just doing a little copying and pasting to make a big, ugly noise for a long time.

He didn't seem to have come to terms with the medium, either the nature of digital sound or the specific Max environment (he kept awkwardly switching back and forth between screens). Especially coming from working on this Christian Marclay piece (a video score, where the job of the performers is to represent images as sound), Zhou Risheng's show struck me as an unsuccessful, poorly thought out attempt at mapping visual information to sound, like putting a wave header on a text file of, I dunno, *War and Peace* and playing it as a

wave file.



Ben Houge - Silence or Silence or Brainwave Communication

Robin Peckham: Interesting how these community dynamics break down. Last year at the Beijing experimental music festival *Sally Can't Dance* some of the guys from the Torturing Nurse circle did a set and started verbally abusing and physically dragging around audience members, which made a lot of people uncomfortable—the scene there isn't really used to that kind of participation.

At one point he tried to drag a musician onto the stage—I forget who now—and immediately got himself into a fistfight with a good portion of the Tongzhou noise scene. He disappeared in the middle of the set and never materialized again for the remainder of the weekend. The general attitude towards him in Beijing is not overwhelmingly positive. He's included in the festivals, record stores, and so on, but there's a distinct personal barrier.

I also think his music isn't quite accepted into the same canon precisely for the reasons you prefer it over Zhou Risheng. Torturing Nurse is always physical, violent, very human, very embodied. Chinese experimental art, specifically in the Hangzhou and Beijing academic lineages, tends to be markedly anti-humanist, and I think that spills over into noise considerably.

This stems from the rejection of socialist realism and the political ethics it spawned after the 85 New Wave movement, and was largely a reaction against what was then perceived as a crude operation of biopower. Back to noise, there's this idea that it should be cold, impersonal, clean, impenetrable—and although there are outliers like Yan Jun's field recordings, much of the Beijing scene tends to be very mechanical. Think Hong Qile, Feng Hao, Wang Fan, and so on.

Ultimately Zhou Risheng fits within this rubric as well, but what interests me about his work is the interplay between machinic elements and human error. The anti-humanist element lies in the the use of a non-sound component turned into audio, but this aural noise comes from patterned human input.

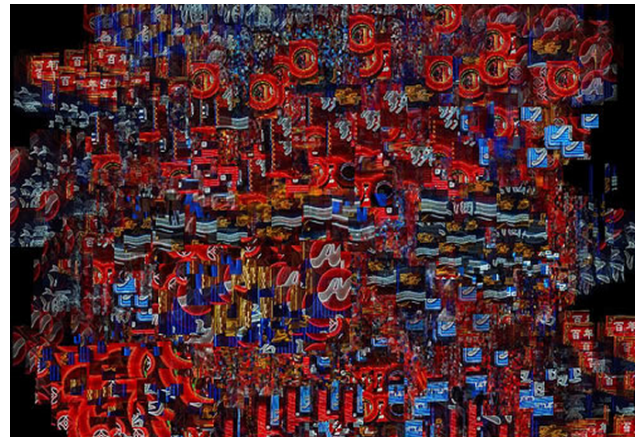
Sometimes his visual input is simply his name, the date, or nonsense, but

at other times he writes brief poems and draws images. Western culture generally privileges the visual (i.e., the Metaphysics), so we have this tension here of the visual as controller that emits harsh and irrational noise, but on the other hand, the visual input is Chinese characters, which adds another level to this diagram of the arbitrary sign. The noise here functions as excess, and overwhelms both its controller, erasing the primacy of the visual, and the language that emerges from the process of control.

The characters literally disappear from the screen as they are translated into noise. This may not require much skill in the use of the software, but I think the conceptual element really lines up with the physical experience of standing there and watching the visual patterns scratched out by mouse being sucked through the speakers. On to mapping, which you mentioned earlier: What kind of work have you seen/heard that uses this technique in the definition you gave before? What do you think of Frederic Jameson and “cognitive mapping”?

He was one of the big postmodern theorists, of course, but lately—especially amongst new media critics—there has been a backlash against this kind of work. The argument goes that cognitive mapping would involve the ultimate

surrender of privacy, leading to a totalitarian transparency more dangerous than the hierarchical networks of power it supports. What role do concepts like the liminal, the hidden, the hacked, the parasitic mean to your conception of mapping? Do they fit within this figuration?



Ben Hogue - 29 Giraffes

Ben Hogue: What I mean by mapping is more practical, or should I say, mechanical, although I can see how it by extension or metaphor might also apply to some of the theoretical topics you’ve brought up. I’m not sure where I first encountered the term, perhaps in grad school, perhaps at an Xbox development conference, but generally people doing similar kinds of work to what I’m doing recognize it as an important component of what they’re doing as well. From chatting with an architect friend of mine recently, it seems the hip term for this (at least in architecture circles) is parametric design.

What I mean by mapping is basically defining a relationship between two

different sets of values, or dimensions. For a simple example (which was probably my point of departure for thinking along these lines), think of a MIDI keyboard controller with a pitch bend wheel controlling a synthesizer. The pitch bend wheel sends out a range of MIDI values that the synthesizer can interpret to modify the pitch being played on the keys.

There's no intrinsic relationship between these sets of data; it's usually preset by the synthesizer manufacturer and modifiable by the synthesizer player. You could easily edit a menu to reconfigure it so that pushing the pitch wheel to the maximum value causes the pitch to rise by a major second or an octave (to cite the two most common cases), or it could be a minor second or a tritone or any other interval you might want.

Since there's no intrinsic relationship between the value of the pitch wheel and the resultant pitch modification, it becomes a question for the artist to decide. Or with just a little more work, you could set the pitch bend wheel to adjust a filter cutoff, or some other synthesis parameter. These cases are obviously quite simple, but in more complex systems, the act of mapping between data types can become an artistic exercise in and of itself.

A more complicated case that arises frequently in digital installation art is connecting a camera to a computer. There's a ton of information coming in from the camera, and you need to define a system for taking information from the camera and applying to whatever it's meant to do, to use it for motion tracking, sound/video synthesis, or whatever. Whereas the pitch of the synthesizer and the values of the pitch bend wheel are pretty easy linear values to link up, the data from a camera is much more complex, comprising RGB components grouped into grids of pixels, presented frame by frame.

If you want it to be anything other than noise, you have to recognize the format of this data and which parts of the data are of most use for the tasks you're trying to accomplish. Again, you can check out my simple "Study for Insomnia" video demo on my blog for an example: I'm using the value of the R, G, and B planes averaged across each frame to control the pitch offset of the filters I'm using on the sound.

Mapping visual information to sound is tricky because the data is so different, but it's an interesting question with lots of possible solutions. So to restate (hopefully not overstate) my objection to Zhou Risheng's performance, he ignored the question completely, or I would

guess he didn't understand the question in the first place.



Ben Houge - Recordings Source Material for Lu Kou (Shanghai)

So there are all kinds of ways to connect two different sets of data, once you know the types of data you're dealing with. It can be a whole sequence of conversions, filters, transpositions, etc., and they don't have to be linear relationships, and they can draw on other data along the way, like a lookup table. One input can be mapped to multiple outputs, or the other way around. Defining these structures becomes an aesthetic exercise of its own. In fact this is the area where a lot of my art resides, and this is the kind of thing that I think really only happens in digital media, to get back to the question of interrogating the medium.

Another way to think of mapping is that it represents the point of convergence between two or more systems. You can think of any multimedia spectacle this way, not just digital media, but opera, ballet, film, etc. Sometimes the music and

dance may go their separate ways, but sometimes they move together, and you can characterize different multimedia artworks by the frequency and nature of these points of convergence, the difference between Merce Cunningham and Mark Morris, for example.

Perhaps this is an easy concept for classical musician like me to grok, having studied serial music of the mid-20th century, in which the parameters of music are often pulled apart and manipulated independently, particularly in total serial works such as those of Milton Babbitt.

This is an important issue in videogames, as well. The Microsoft Xbox audio creation tool exposes what they call (as I recall) "parametric sliders," which you can use to connect some parameter coming from somewhere else in the game engine to some aspect of your sound data. Maybe a programmer uses this to tell you the health of your player, or the number of enemies attacking you, or the speed of your vehicle, or whatever, and then you as an audio designer can use this tool to define that this range of values should be linked to, say, a certain tempo range in your music soundtrack, or a certain pitch and volume range of your car engine sound. Mapping game parameters to audio parameters is an important part of the game audio

designer's job.

As far as the liminal, hidden, hacked I'm not sure if it doesn't figure in, or if that's maybe all I'm talking about. These mapping operations I'm talking about happen at the borders of perceptual phenomena, windows from one into the other; it's actually related to the hinges of the Calder mobile I mentioned elsewhere. Maybe you could call that hacking, but I guess it's definitely hidden. But there's probably a totally separate question of transgression that is really not something I'm dealing with, copyright law, ownership, etc.



Ben Hogue - Christian Marclay's Screenplay at E-Arts Shanghai

Robin Peckham: I see we were using the term “mapping” in different sense, you in terms of creating analogical correspondences and I in terms of cartographic practices. However, I think this slippage could be interesting in and of itself. Where do the projects of representing a territory and building correspondences coincide? This could be an interesting area for further research, perhaps

bringing the tradition of cartographic analysis in poststructuralist theory to bear on the specific practice you're discussing here.

At the end of our first discussion you brought up interactivity, criticizing it as it is commonly used in big media art exhibitions. Can you provide a definition of “deep interactivity”? What kind of work would fit this rubric, and would it be any different from the participatory, or relational aesthetics? I'm curious especially about the role of duration, whether continued interactivity is automatically better than refrigerator door art. Or is it more a question of affect, about the nature of audience response?

Ben Hogue: I think someone coming from a background in videogames has a particularly deep understanding of what interactivity can be, much deeper than what is commonly seen in interactive art installations. As one indicator, simply look at the interface mechanism for an Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3: it's a huge joystick covered with knobs and buttons and levers, quite intimidating to the uninitiated (which is why Nintendo was able to conquer new demographics by dramatically streamlining the Wii interface). The Wii and PlayStation 3 controllers, as well as the iPhone, also track gestural input, and camera interfaces are

available for all of the current consoles, I believe.

In addition to simply having all of these avenues of input into the game system, game designers have a few decades of experience by this point of mapping all of this user input into meaningful actions or behaviors within the game system. At a basic level, this is how we define different game genres, whether the right trigger is mapped to an accelerator on a virtual car or a firing mechanism on a virtual gun, for example. To a large extent, this mapping of input to behavior is what defines a game, and this is something that is considered anew for each game, though of course there are genre conventions.

So I would say that a modern videogame represents about the richest interactive experience around. Now contrast this with what you typically see in an interactive art installation. Cameras or motion detectors that do something flashy when you wave your hand. A video path that leaves butterflies in your shadow as you walk on it. Plastic figures that make noise if you hit them. All of this stuff is so basic. There's a one-to-one correspondence of input to output, with none of the sophisticated mapping techniques or creative system defining strategies that to me constitute the fascinating guts of digital art.



Ben Hogue - RadioSpace

If you wanted to quantify it, you could return to the “points of convergence” idea above; an Xbox controller provides multiple points of convergence between the behavior of a user sitting on a couch and a sophisticated game system, which means a closer link, which you could define as “deeper interactivity,” providing more control to the player over the experience.

I'll illustrate my point with an example. I showed one self-styled media art broker my piece “Radiospace,” and her reaction was, “Hey, you know, you could make this interactive, with a motion detector to turn it on and off when people approach it!” And I had to really bite my tongue.

First of all, that's hardly interactive at all. It's flipping a switch. It's not even a neat technological trick anymore, like it might have been in the 1980s when people started installing motion detecting lights on their garages. Interactivity isn't a binary question (like linearity and all the things I listed

in the previous discussion that got me thinking about interactivity in the first place); it's a continuum, and pieces can be very interactive or hardly interactive or anywhere in between. Here there's exactly one point of convergence between two totally independent systems (the viewer and the piece). By that definition, what isn't interactive?

The other important issue to me, of course, is that *Radiospace* is an environment. I don't want it to turn on and off, anymore than people can turn a mountain or a sunset on or off. That's more a unique consideration for the kind of art I'm doing in particular. It was a bit frustrating to find such an immature understanding of interactive art even at that space claiming to be a leader in new media in China.

One reason you see so much junk in this arena is actually the flip side of a positive development, which is that the barrier to entry for interactive art has become pretty low. You can buy Max/MSP/Jitter for less than USD\$500, and if you hook it up to a web cam, projector, and some speakers, you're ready to go. I hope that this means soon more people will get over the "look what I can do" phase and start probing a little bit deeper. It would be great if these issues were to penetrate more deeply into popular consciousness. Time will

tell. The continuing proliferation of videogames also bodes well.

Your question of duration gets to one of the big issues of digital art for me: ambiguity. This goes beyond simply the amount of time that someone stands in a room playing with an installation. Ambiguity allows a piece to function on the super long term, the way people can have a lifelong relationship with an artwork like *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. If something is ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations, it engages the viewer/user more deeply, requiring him/her to complete the piece in his/her head, to take it with them and continue to think about it, and come back to it. This is why something like Mahler's sixth symphony is so endlessly rewarding to revisit, because it yields new insights with each performance.

Ambiguity is an important factor in all art, but it's extremely rare in digital art (think again of the extremely simple one-to-one mapping of the butterfly path example above; this is why these types of things are cropping up in escapist meccas like malls, where you're not meant to be troubled with anything but shopping). And in this regard games aren't much more sophisticated, still relying on extremely blunt realism and good guy/bad guy dialectics, although there are signs of progress.



Ben Hogue - Mobile 3 & Study for Eventual World Domination at Noishanghai

I can't say I've seen much in the way of real-time digital art installation that gives me this sense of wanting to come back and dig for fresh insights. The vast majority of the time, you play with a piece until you figure out how it works, and then you forget it and move on. I've read about intriguing examples, works by pioneers like Char Davies and David Rokeby, but I haven't experienced their interactive work live (though I saw a cool, non-interactive Rokeby piece at eArts last year). Olafur Eliasson's also on the right track, although the digital aspect of his work is more behind the scenes.

In fact, I could probably say that I've made ambiguity the focus of much of my work. This is why I want to create virtual environments, places for people to come back to. A lot of people ask me what my installation pieces are specifically about (I think people are used to having a very clear, often blunt, message or idea), and of course I can't say; they're more about

mood and atmosphere, I guess.

This is probably also why I've avoided the issue of interactivity in my non-game work to date. I don't want to tackle it until I feel like I can do something significant with it; a lot of times one blunt, interactive feature can cheapen a piece.

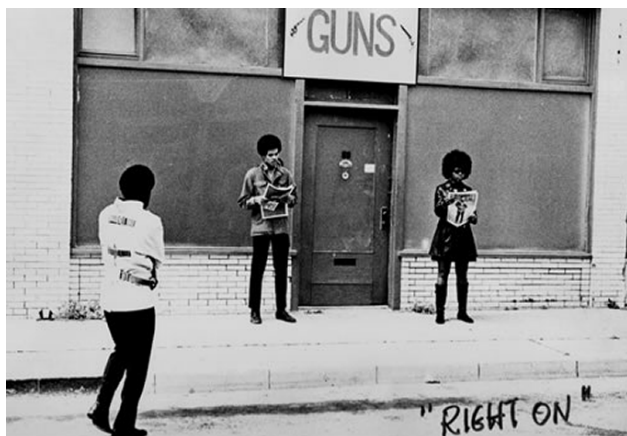
There are all kinds of interesting ways to go. Most games involve some element of role-playing (usually a form of escapism, but doesn't have to be). Or you can use an interactive game environment to implicate an audience in some event or situation; I saw this done in a very simple but effective way in a piece by Peterson Kamwathi at Kuona Trust, in a completely non-digital mini-golf game that had key phrases from recent government scandals inscribed on the golf balls.

Personally, I'm most interested in using interactivity to create more responsive environments, places that feel alive. Or you can use interactivity to provide an alternate window on a known phenomenon, some kind of sonification or visualization. It's wide open, but so little of the interactive art I've seen is pushing the boundary in this direction.

<http://benhogue.com/>

A Movie About The Revolution: Seize The Time

Alessio Galbiati



Antonello Branca - Seize the Time (1970)

From June 1st you can find “Seize the Time” in bookshops and online stores. The DVD + book (Federico Carra Editore, 19) contains the text published hereby by courtesy of Kiwido.

Nowadays, “Seize the Time” could be labelled as a docufiction about the Black Panther movement made in 1970 by the Italian filmmaker Antonello Branca. This remarkable work is finally available again to the public after years spent in oblivion. It can be possible thanks to Federico Carra and his Kiwido and the collaboration of ACAB (Associazione Culturale Antonello Branca).

Seize the Time is a movie about and with the Black Panthers. It brings together drama, fiction cinema and documentary cinema. Antonello

Branca was one of the few Italian filmmakers able to witness American society from within. With his camera he was quick to catch the social changes taking place in U.S. society during the mid '60s. As a mark of such quest, the DVD published by Kiwido also contains “What’s happening?”, a live documentary of 1967 about the Beat Generation and Pop Art, a portrait of America seen through the eyes of artists and intellectuals who were about to revolutionize (forever) the international artistic panorama. Allen Ginsberg, Roy Lichtenstein, Fred Mogubgub, Andy Warhol, Marie Benois, Robert Rauschenberg, Leon Kraushar, Gregory Corso.

This well-chosen combination of two supposedly different works ” a “political” film and a documentary about the world of art”, puts in evidence the curiosity of the Italian filmmaker, a lifetime passion ended in 2002 after more than sixty undiscovered documentaries. [Alessio Galbiati Rapporto Confidenziale N° 25].



Antonello Blanda - What's Happening (1967)

The author of the article is Nobuko Miyamoto, Artistic director of Great Leap, a non-profit arts organization based in Los Angeles and founded in 1978. Nobuko, music and theatre author, keeps creating art works believing in the power of art to transform society.

A MOVIE ABOUT THE REVOLUTION di Nobuko Miyamoto

I first met Antonello Blanda in 1968. He was in Los Angeles to make short documentaries about California on behalf of the Italian television. Actually that was a preliminary work for a film he wanted to produce. It was the story of a young man passing from Black Nationalism to Revolutionary Nationalism, joining the Black Panther Party. Antonello wanted to make a film in a revolutionary way: with no screenplay, no professional actors (except Norman Jacobs) and with little funding. A "guerrilla" production with appearance by the Black Panthers.

He asked for my help. I knew very little about filmmaking (apart from my appearances as a dancer in movies or musicals) and completely nothing about politics. Actually, I was a little scared of the Black Panthers, but one of Antonello's major skills was to get the answers he wanted. I agreed and jumped into the water. At the time many people jumped into the turbulent waters of revolution.

It was 1968 and America was fighting on two fronts: the war in Vietnam and a war at home. There were students protesting against the system all over the country, marching against military service and war; women joined to ask for equal rights; Cesar Chavez organized farm workers and the Grape Boycott; Native Americans occupied Alcatraz; the young Americans flared up for freedom, while music was blaring out rebellion. But it was the Black Panther Party to draw the American Government's attention and rage. The legacy of Malcom X, the activists wearing leather jackets and black berets, armed with Mao's little red book and Marxist-Leninist theory, the rifles to defend themselves and a ten-point plan made them the protagonists of that revolutionary stage.



Antonello Blanda - Seize the Time (1970)

I will never know how Antonello could ask them to appear in the film.

They were smart and made the media and the black community the “living theatre” of their war. They used to head for the capital of California with rifles in their hands to protest against the oppression of the police. The fighting with the “swines” (that’s how they called the policemen) was endless. The police assaulted Panthers’ headquarters all over the country. Black Panthers’ leaders Huey Newton, Bobby Seale and Geronimo were arrested. Bunchy Carter, Fred Hampton and others were assassinated. The Panthers helped their people in different ways, like the Free Breakfast for School Children Program and health service programs. At the same time, they defended their political prisoners and were busy in the armed struggle. How could they take into consideration the idea to participate to Blanda’s little production?

Antonello was like this. He made them

agree. Everyday our assault crew (Rafael, Norman and I) tried to follow Antonello’s creativity sharing food and drink and a flat, having meetings with Panthers’ leaders who used to come in with their rifles. Elaine Brown’s songs where the sound track Yes! That’s what inspired the title: “Seize the Time”.

Meeting Geronimo. Geronimo arrested. We make the video “Breakfast for Children” serving them eggs and love. People’s power! Right on!

The documentary first. We go to Berkley where protests on defence of “People’s Park” are taking place, the tanks advance, the National Guard marches, I support Antonello shooting the police holding bayonets to his camera. Tear gases are choking us at Berkley campus, crowds are marching, I’m hit by a stick and I can see the violence of the policemen. People’s power! Right on!

In New York we shoot the Young Lords’ takeover of a Church in East Harlem; back to Los Angeles, we shoot the Panther Erica Huggins giving birth to her baby. Eldridge Cleaver in Algeria, Huey in prison, in California. The Panthers come to a political split. How could Antonello think to make a film in such a dangerous and chaotic period? That documentary was in his mind like

improvising in jazz, made of people and situations met on the way as the world was spinning around us. To me, such experience was like a close look to another side of the Panthers. I will never forget a lecture on community politics by Masai Hewitt, the Ministry of Education, in Los Angeles. A young brother could barely read out loud from the Little Red Book.



Antonello Branca - Seize the Time (1970)

Masai had translated without indulgence the meaning of “serve the people” in the street language. I thought: “That’s amazing, that’s real love for the people.” Then, someone called me sister at the Breakfast for

Children Program. I was a stranger, a Japanese-American, but that person made me feel part of the family. That was love too. I wasn’t scared of the Panthers anymore.

This article is just a quick glance to our experience in making “Seize the Time”. Maybe the film was only an excuse to take part to such an epic moment, to learn, to eyewitness their sufferings and dreams, to breath their longing for revolution. Making a film about the revolution was really hard, but revolutionizing ourselves is even harder.

<http://www.kiwido.it>

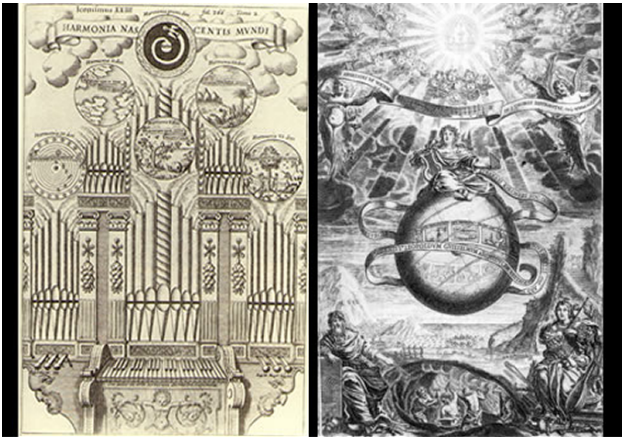
<http://kiwido.it/dvd/scheda.asp?id=34>

<http://www.associazioneantonellobranca.org>

<http://www.rapportoconfidenziale.org/?p=6439>

Athanasius Kircher. Arca Musarithmica And Many Sound Devices

Claudia Maina



Athanasius Kircher - La Nascita del Mondo - Musurgia Universalis Vol.2 (1650)

Researching possible origins and theoretical roots of Sound Sculpture and Sound Art it isn't rare to get to face the oeuvre of Jesuit priest Athanasius Kircher, an intriguing character who has been a point of reference for the work of many artists. We will here attempt to get closer to his poetics and understand which are the elements in his research that foremost might have influenced aforementioned fields.

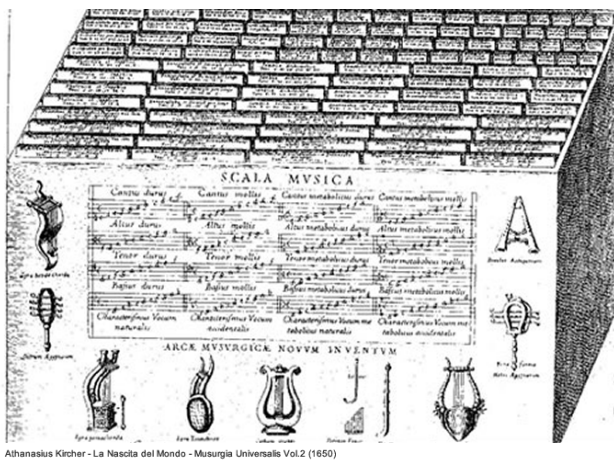
Athanasius Kircher, the younger of nine brothers, was born on 2nd of May 1601 in Geisa, (near Fulda) Germany. His father, Johann Kircher, doctor/professor in philosophy and theology and an amateur musician, gets him to approach music. He joins the Jesuit Order in 1618 and attends their school in Pateborn. Then, from

1629 he is in Wurzburg university, Professor in philosophy, maths and oriental languages. Kircher is in Rome in 1638, when he is appointed Professor in mathematics, physics and Oriental Languages at the Collegio Romano. In 1651 he founds the famous Collegio Romano Muesum.

Project to which he dedicates himself for thirty years, "father Athanasius chamber of wonders anticipated modern science museums, since it taught whilst entertaining through extravagant experiments and continuously referring to images." (Lo Sardo, Eugenio., "Athanasius Kircher. Il museo del mondo", Roma, De Luca editions, 2001, p. 15). He always remains in Rome except from occasional travels around Italy and to Malta, between 1636 and 1637. He dies in Rome on the 27th of November, 1680.

Athanasius Kircher's oeuvre is distributed within forty printed-books and over two thousands manuscripts and letters. His most important book concerning music is the "Musurgia Universalis" (1650), although important sections concerning designing of

musical instruments and illusionistic machines can be found in many other works: “Magnes sive De Arte Magnetica” (1641) “Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae” (1646), “Ars Magna Sciendi” (1669) and especially “Phonurgia Nova” (1673), the latter being entirely concerning nature and features of sound and acoustics.



Athanasius Kircher - La Nascita del Mondo - Musurgia Universalis Vol.2 (1650)

The “Musurgia Universalis”, an encyclopaedia-size work composed by ten books divided in two tomes of 1152 pages altogether. The work begins from an investigation on ‘natural’ sound and voice physiology (book I), proceeding to speculations about the origins of music (Book II) and focusing in the III and IV books, on theoretical conjectures about harmonic science. The V book concerns music theory, whilst the VI is about musical instruments. In the VII book the brightest example of Baroque’s “theory of affection” of which Kircher is one of the most relevant theorists.

He states, for instance, that music can

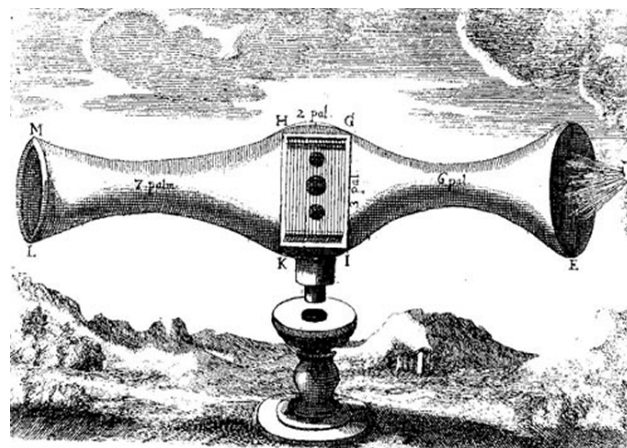
affect people differently, depending on each individual’s mood. To endorse his own theory he makes experiments on the vibration property in different liquids (considered as moods) poured in five chalices set on a table (AA.VV., “The Great Art of Knowing. The Baroque Encyclopedia of Athanasius Kircher” Edited by Daniel Stolzenberg, Stanford University Libraries, 2001, ed. Cadmo, 2001, p. 74). We will tackle the eighth book in detail later. In the IX the claimed power music has on people, healing from diseases including tarantula’s bite and plague.

The X book contains an example of Baroque’s concept of the spheres’ harmony, in which the symbolism of numbers and mathematical theory of harmonic proportions result to be tightly bound to the philosophical enquiry about origins and order of the Universe. Kircher asserts that the world’s structure is determined by a balance between all beings, harmonized with each other by a God seen as a supreme organist (img.1).

However, the one section being more useful for research is book VIII, where it shows a new method of composing which Kircher christens *De Musurgia Mirifica* (the translation could be *Marvellous Art of forging Music*), based on combinatory art’s rules and comprising the only vocal music field as a matter of fact. Starting from a chosen piece of poetry he aims to put

in music, the Composer must begin a series of calculations and operations which will lead him to get the final piece. In order to achieve this, special four voices chord voices are used; these Tabellae melotacticae follow the figured bass rule, both for the contrappuntus simplex and the contrappunctus floridus (where the melody/ies summed to the given chant, present different rhythmical values).

Each one of those includes sequences set to be adapted to particular poetic meters called *Mutarihmi* consisting in sets of figures disposed on four lines. Each chord corresponds to a syllable in the text that has to be put in music. In the *Musarithmus* the melodic line is read from right to left and the harmonic one from bottom to top, whereas the four horizontal lines refer to the vocal harmony's four parts: bass, tenor, alto and contralto. In the Tabellae melotacticae boards, together with the *Musarithmi* are further rhythmical structures based on binary and ternary times that can be applied to any notes sequence. To put in music the chosen verses it is hence necessary to assemble a sequence of ciphered chords, namely a series of Musarithms, which are to be transcribed on the staff until the whole text is over (Chierotti, Carlo, Mario., "La Musurgia Universalis di Athanasius Kircher", see original article on www.chierotti.net p.1).



Athanasius Kircher - Ape Eolica - Phonurgia Nova (1673)

It is plain clear how it can be captivating for a contemporary artist, to be confronting such a method applied to computerized systems. The "De Musurgia Mirifica" basing itself on combinations and chords boards, prepared sequences and rhythmical structures devised to be put in sequence, could be interpreted as a forerunner of digital composition. Sound sampling and the use of rhythmic pattern and frequency modulators used in audio editing could well fit to be studied and compared to such system of composing.

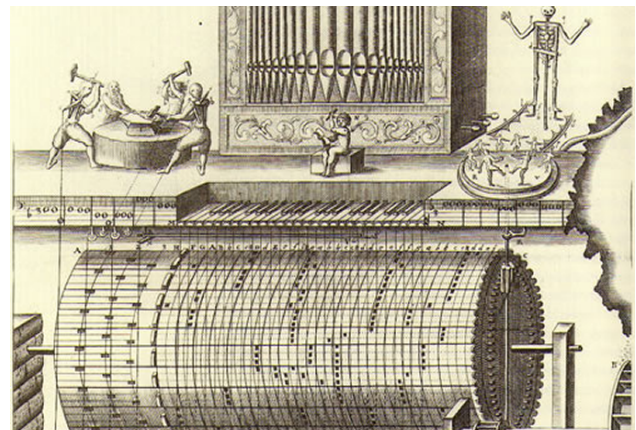
What's most remarkable in Sound Sculpture is however the composing machine, the Arca Musarithmica of which functioning Kircher talks about in the last fourteen pages of Book VIII. It is not actually a real "machine", yet more similar to some kind of "basic computer" (AA.VV., "Humans, are they really necessary? In The wire. Adventure in modern music", issue 186, august, 1999, p. 24). A box in

which samples of compatible-t-
-phrases *Musarithmi* are set. “The machine was way smaller than what I thought, not a large box but a tiny mahogany one, not larger than a book, with an oblique section closed by a hinge under which a small glass label was fixed.

On the side was written ATHANASII KIRCHERI MUSURGIA, on the front face ABACUS TONORUM and below MIXTURA TONORUM. On the back ABACUS CONTRAPUNCTIONIS. Writings indicating that that hence was a device for musical calculation. However, the mentioned “inside”, was made inaccessible by that glass label fixed over it: “I could see from outside that there were seventy-seven small sliding panels of which sizes varied between one centimeters and two and a half.” (Haakman, Anton., “Il mondo sotterraneo di Athanasius Kircher” - “De onderaardse wereld van Athanasius Kircher” - Milano, ed. Garzanti, 1995. p. 154).

We can think of the *Arca Musarithmica* as a device halfway between a sculpture and a musical instrument. A mysterious object standing on a line of research that runs through the designing of automats and mechanisms and gets to Luigi Russolo’s *In tonarumori* and Marcel Duchamp’s *A Bruit Secret*. This suggestion leads us to imagine a connection between the works of

artists as for instance Jean Tinguely, Harry Bertoia and the Baschet brothers. Some of the instruments designed by Kircher are remarkably beautiful, seeming to be oscillating between science and dream, like the peculiar Arpa Eolica [Aeolian Harp n.d.t.] and a Organo Idraulico con Automa [Hydraulic Organ with Automaton] (For deepening see Thomas, L. Hankins and Robert, J. Silverman., “The Aeolian harp and the Romantic Quest of Nature”, in *Intruments and Imagination*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995).



Athanasius Kircher - Organo Idraulico con Automa - Musurgia Universalis Vol.2 (1650)

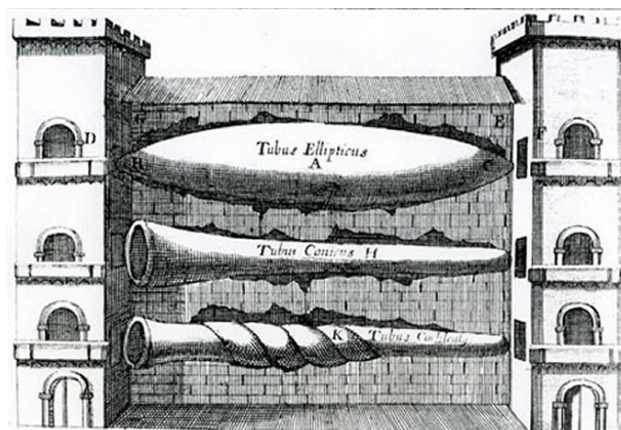
Athanasius Kircher has perfect knowledge of classic Greek and Latin texts from which he gets inspiration for his experiments on sound and mechanical devices making. He is especially keen on Erone d’Alessandria’s works (1st cent. a.c) who had invented, among other things, water clocks, pneumatic organs and other mechanical music devices. Kircher refers to that in his

Phonurgia, where he contemplates the properties of transmission of horns' sound. He employs such systems to generate amazing effects, like making statues talk in the *Delphic Sibyl* and *Talking Statue* cases.

"Later in time I was asked to move my private Museum in a wider and appropriate place in the Collegio Romano, the one they call the gallery. The pipe I previously mentioned was moved there too, and can now be admired and heard under the name of *Delphic Sibyl*, with the consequent difference: the pipe, previously transmitting distant loudspoken words, now act secretly through facetious oracles and false consultations with a muffled voice, therefore nobody notices anything about the secret techniques of this whispered dialogue. And at the very time it is shown to strangers who do not understand the way the machine works, it is not rare that some get to believe in a manifestation of the Devil himself, since the statue opens and closes its mouth and moves its mouth." (AA.VV., "The great art of knowing". Op. Cit. p. 228).

Kircher aims to arise wonders effects of artificial magic, namely the art or ability to produce something marvelous through human work, making use of diverse instruments for a decadent wealthy class in lack of principles and moral. The machines

achieve a primary role in the flourishing Baroque culture of special effects and water setup fountains. He indeed did design many machines and devices. A full cataloguing and analysis of his creations was given to us by two of his disciples. In 1657 Kapar Scott publishes the "*Mechanica Idraulica-Pneumatica*" a thorough description of the hydraulic and pneumatic devices in the museum. In 1678 Giorgio di Sepi "Kircher's assistant in devices' realization", edits the first catalogue of the *Museum Kircherianum* where a complete list can be found.



Athanasius Kircher - Ellissi acustiche che consentono di comunicare in segreto - Ars Magna Luci et Umbrae (1642)

If we take under consideration one of the base elements of Sound Art, namely the relation between space and sound, in relation with who perceives dimensions through listening, some of the devices Kircher created are of relevant interest. Through a system of sound transmission that makes use of pipes and elliptic-shaped architectural constructions, Kircher connects

buildings and rooms, broadcasting musics and sounds from one room to another.

The applications of that are by him described in the “Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae”(1646; Book X, IIIrd part, metamorphosis I, II and III). He, figures the possibility to connect two buildings in order to, for instance, allow two princes to secretly communicate while staying in separate rooms. “Between two rooms of arbitrary width, create a space of 100ft or more, then realize within such space enclosed between two walls an acoustic ellipse making the two focal points in both rooms coincide with a small window placed there for this aim. The words uttered by the prince standing near window B, even though being whispered, will be heard by the other prince standing by window C as clearly as if the two of them were standing next to each other” (“Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae”, Book I, p. 99-101).

In man of such projects sound diffusion is employed under service of amazement and magica fascination for the spectator. Kircher explains how “to makò possibile that a delicate concert of voices and instruments of any kind is hearable within the range of tao or tare miles, so that nobody could fathom its suore”(“Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae”, Book I, p. 143-144). An operation of this kind requires the

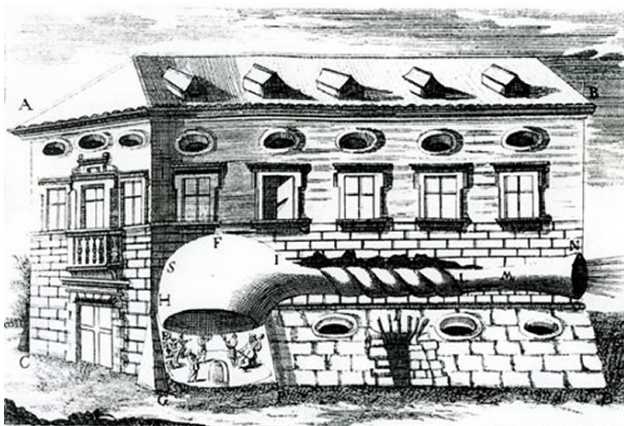
express construction of a secret room inside the palace “of a curious prince”. The room must be built using chalk, its surface being concave as a sphere and it must have a secret door and a window in order to enlighten the ambient.

The room will then be put in communication with the outside through a pipe which constitutes the extension of the hemispheric vault. It is then necessary to position the end hole of this in a predetermined, usually quite crowded location. The musicians hidden in the room begin to play. Sound grows thank to the reverberation of intensity and the only direction it can go is through the pipe, thus being diffused through the aperture. “Al those in the area around couldn’t help to be bewildered and amazed hearing this prodigious music, wondering wether the source of such melodic polyphony would be on earth or heaven.” (“Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae” Quote).

At this point we can identify in the sound spatialization realized by Kircher as well as in his way of employing it in order to put the individual in relation with space, a believable connection with some of the specific features of Sound Art. Thinking for example about Max Neuhaus projects *Water Whistle Series* (realized between 1971 and 1974), the feature both accosting and

of fascination for the spectator, who is in the situation of listening to sound while being soaked in water, directly recalls the stupor raised by the Kircher's articulated acoustic structures.

In some of Christina Kubish installations, as for example *Five Fields* (2002), we can see how the spectator is directed within the environment not just by sight, but chiefly by perceiving different diapason sounds in the very space. He is pervaded by ultraviolet light, which modifies the room's boundaries, and feels disorientated and stricken by a sense of dizziness.



Athanasius Kircher - Concerto diffuso tramite tubo codeato- Ars Magna Luci et Umbrae (1647)

We can recognize influences by Athanasius Kircher work in many artists' projects. An example of this being the Italian exhibition dedicated to him, *Sonorità prospettiche: suono, ambiente e immagine* [*Perspectival sonorities: sound, environment and image*], showed in Rimini in 1982, where Sound Art projects about the relationship between environment

and sound were displayed.

There are in the exhibition some of Max Eastley drafts for the *Biddick Art Farm Center* in Washington, in which he puts forward a system of devices activated by wind. PVC flutes and a few Aeolian Harp that through their natural forms do indeed show similarities with the Jesuit's instruments and are surely affected by the charm of those. Alvin Lucier's *Solarimini* is the project for an installation based on sounds which vary depending on atmospheric conditions, through the implementation of a small solar panel in a room. Equally interesting are Albert Mayr's graphical scores for his performance *Signals from the harbor* [*Segnali dal porto*] in which the rhythm of the two sound-articulated signals (the harbor's lighthouse and the fog lamp) spreads over the urban territory demarcating many different areas of audibility as many performers there are.

Max Neuhaus presents a project for the metropolitan passage Montparnasse-Bienvenue in Paris. He explains how his sound installations wield the environment itself, to achieve a re-definition of the space they are in, generating auditory topographies. The sources of sound are concealed, thus sounds become a natural element of the very space. *Music with Spheres* [*Musica con sfere*]

by Terry Riley, instead, is a performance interpreted by musicians, who operate with a quadriphonic diffusion of sound in a room with loudspeakers positioned on the ceiling and directed by dancing performers. Karlheinz Stockhausen's unrealized project *Tunnel-Spiral* is puts forward the creation of a sound-tunnel in the shape of a composition. The placement of loudspeakers which emit sounds with predetermined delays depends on the time needed to pass through the tunnel. That creates the temporal and rhythmical subdivision in the composition.

Christina Kubish's *The Bird Tree*, is presented in the shape of a tree, on which several electric cables are tangled. These are connected to a number power amplifiers which are attached to recorders that broadcast bird calls. Lastly, the *Windscube* by Leif Brush, shows the realization of a sound-cube inside which a tree grows. This structure is set by the side of several kinds sensors and electronic translators and it interacts with natural events such as rain, snow and wind (AA.VV., "Sonorità prospettiche: suono, ambiente e immagine", catalogue by Franco Masotti, Rimini, Il Comune editions, 1982).

At this point becomes spontaneous to search through the displayed projects and look for poetic similarities with Kircher's theoretical works, especially

about attempts to put in connections the techno-machinary feature with nature through the use of sound. From that, dynamics of relations arise, generating bewilderment and stupor in the spectator experiencing the artwork.

Such tension brings our analysis back to the Jesuit and it seems interesting, in conclusion, to quote his definition of natural magic: "I call natural magic anything producing unusual and prodigious just through simple natural causes, excluding any interaction with the Enemy of human kind. Of such kind are those machines which are for this reason called "taumaturgikai" that at times, superbly, give prodigious movement to images through the implementation of a stream of air or water contained in a siphon, and at times blow air inside a device set in such way that a stream of words will suddenly flow out the statues, and similar things, which can appear to be miracles to those who ignore the actual causes."

(Lo Sardo. Op. Cit. p. 234). He sees nature as God's artwork and does involve himself in an analogue relationship with whole creation, through his technical production and constant research. His devices " Can thus be compared to miniaturized artificial universes, which transmit cryptical messages from a playful creator." (Op. quote).



Athanasius Kircher - Camera per il vento per organo idraulico - Musurgia Universalis (1650)

His creative sensitivity, continuously merging with magic, puts him to be in the same relationship there is between an artist and his work. For instance, in his imaginary worlds angels and daemons overlap and live within marvelous events. Watching them we are caught by the will to believe, to be completely be spectators. Convince ourselves that we are witnessing pure mystery and eventually see the trick be unveiled and be equally amazed. The magician is the one able to make others dream new possible universes. In the very same way in which an artist unveils his creation in front of our eyes, Kircher as “nature magician” allows us to deeply get in relation with our vision of the world. Looking at his drawings we are caught by doubt and curiosity. Can we pronounce Kircher a proper artist?

The answer to this question will remain indefinite and is this very blurriness that charms and stimulates us. The presence in his works of both scientific will and sense of magic introduces us in a dimension most similar to the one in which we find ourselves today watching a piece of art. Furthermore, to use sound as pivotal point of the illusory game, in order to arise emotional effects among the public and at the same time to exasperate its mathematical aspects, bringing the composition on the level of pure combinatory calculations underlining a continuous tension, visible in each one of his machines and mechanical instruments.

Maybe we are re-reading (and re-watching, especially) Kircher exactly because of this tension that has never been put together again and perceive him as the more contemporary of our ancestors and the less present of our . This same unsettlement can be the reason to be, still nowadays, fed by the artists that have turned to him in the constant research on sound and the relationships it has with the environment, men and space.

Fair Trade Social Networks. Solidarity As Key Factor

Gigi Ghezzi



Zoes.it - Campagna Nazionale "Salva L'acqua" - Il Governo privatizza L'acqua!

For the drawing up of this article I would like to thank Andrea Di Stefano, director of the magazine "Valori" and Mauro Meggiolaro, consultant of the Banca Etica Group and curator of the text "Ho sognato una banca" (I dreamed of a bank) in which he interviews Fabio Salvato, Banca Etica's President.

Renewed discovery of forgotten knowledge, sharing and deepening of hobbies, new friends and relationships, exhibitionism, amusements, etc. The list of private ways to use *social networks*, and of course the *social networks* themselves, is constantly widening. There are many cases in which the profiles are referable to collective or professional activities based above all on promotion functions, engagement

and widening of someone's personal image on the web, or rather strengthening and personalizing the relationship with customers (see for example the philosophy of *social media* - -

<http://www.northropgrumman.com/socialmedia> - described in the International corporate for safety Northrop Grumman).

As Anna Munster and Andrew Murphie of the University of New South Wales in Sydney say: "Web 2.0 is not an "is", or not only this. Web 2.0 is also a verb or, as they taught us in primary school, it's a doing word. Here's a list of some web 2.0 things to do: apping, blogging, mapping, mashing, geocaching, tagging, searching, shopping, sharing, socialising and wikkiing. And the list goes on" (cfr. "Web 2.0: Before, during and after the event", Issue 14, Fibreculture.

<http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue14/index.html>. This edition is entirely dedicated to Web 2.0).



In all this relational ferment, a must-have is a *social network* clearly dedicated to “fair trade” nets engaged in fair trade projects. It is therefore not only a technologic system of socialization implicitly based on solidarity, but also a real *community* of “citizens” who approve, propose, research and widespread fair trade and sustainable initiatives. The first – and at the present time the only one – *social network* of this kind is Zoes.it (<http://zoes.it/>). It is an experience already announced by other Italian sites and blogs, but that is worth a further discussion (some articles on this topics have been written by magazines such as “Isola di parole” – <http://isoladiparole.blogspot.com/2008/11/zoes> – “Wired” <http://www.wired.it/news/archivio/2009-05/27/> - or Digimag itself in the past – <http://www.dgimag.it/internet/cesviamo-il-social-network-solidale-1624>)

Zoes is an acronym which literally

means ZOna Equo Sostenibile (Fair Trade Sustainable Zone): “It is a sustainable community which aims at acting by changing everybody’s life style “. This project, supported and funded by Banca Etica and Fondazione Sistema Toscana, is fully operating since October 2009 and reached nowadays a population of about “10000 persons” as Adriana De Cesare, project manager of Fondazione sistema Toscana and person in charge of Zoes.it project, said.

Less *user friendly* and *voyeur* than Facebook but with a higher contact productivity, this *social network* aims at creating common and concrete initiatives to support sustainability and ethic finance. Private subjects, small companies, agricultural markets, GAS share and create ecological experiences that become social and economical experiences, without excluding the aggregation moments typical of the usual *social network*. This phenomena are given a precise address such as an excursion to the mountains or the organization of common trips to International conferences like the Copenhagen Clima Conference, maybe by bicycle.

Andrea Tracanzan, speaker of Zoes on behalf of Fondazione Culturale Responsabilità etica, interviewed by Corrado Fontana for the magazine “Valori”, explains in a very clear way

the three guidelines of Zoes development: “Listen to users’ requests, give cooperation instruments to community inhabitants, organize training activities. We will keep on this way, aware of the fact that the decisive improvement of Zona equosolidale depends on the ability to be open and inclusive: our mission is promoting sustainable behaviors, new life styles, production processes and consumption ideas.” (“Valori”, May 2010, n.79, p.51).



Urgenci.net - Campagna per il consumo responsabile

If Zoes is able to hang on to this philosophy, it will have all the right credentials to become an unifying system to share experiences, sometime even historical, that thanks to their micro-community nature had a development like leopard’s spots, i.e. true islands in the net that are like points of success from the point of view of sustainability, but that unfortunately are difficult to be coordinated and energy demanding

for each attempt of global synthesis and communication.

An example of collection of these experiences is the net called [URGENCI](http://www.retegas.org/), a urban-rural network aiming at the creation of new exchange ways among citizens, consumers and small farmers using an alternative economical approach called Local Solidarity Partnerships between Producers and Consumers (LSPPC). URGENCI was founded in 2005 in Portugal and collects associations like the French AMAP, the English CSA, ASC from Quebec, the Japanese Teikeis, the Portuguese Reciproco, the GAS and the “fair trade economical net” in Italy(
<http://www.retegas.org/> ; <http://www.retecosol.org/>). Among its objectives there are: disseminating knowledge, supporting access to lands and social inclusion and finally support a responsible consumption theory.

The use of telematic instruments on a social level conveys a sense of *déjà-vu* because for many users the objective seems to be the achievement of a broader socialization in the net. However the use of social networks needs a continuous analysis effort because what the dynamics of construction of the connection points and their density remain incomprehensible. Moreover for

sustainable networks it is also necessary to be ready to participate at associative relationships that re-establish a social-economical balance, to help in difficult situations and to support upright experiences and last but not least to support inclusivity and contrast management.

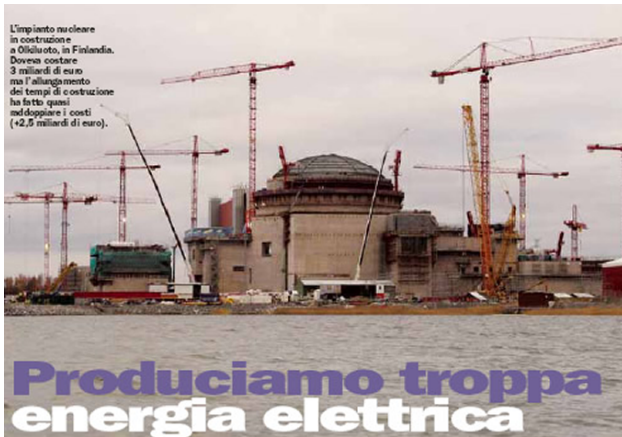


Immagine tratta dalla rivista "Valori" - Anno 10, Numero 79, Maggio 2010, Pag. 42

The anthropologist Dipak R. Pant in the editorial of the magazine "Valori" (see above) rightly identifies 4 main ingredients that represent invaluable resources for a good future life, but that are at the same time challenged by the great economical systems:

- the quality and quantity of environmental resources;
- the esthetic relevance of the natural and the historical shaped landscape;
- the identity approach and the affective micro-system (small communities and communities in contact with each other);

- the new business based on agro-food, cultural and landscape resources and also on services for communities situated in the most remote places of the world.

According to Pant, solidarity nets should create a shared planning instrument of place-system: a communication leverage for towns, provinces, regions and central governments with company owners, civic associations and citizens in general. Solidarity communities should create a culture of sustainability, cohesion and social sharing and contribute from a front line to regulatory framework as regards investments in fair trade funds, until rapidly correcting distortions and wastes.



Zoes.it - Campagna Pubblicitaria

It should be added that these nets, if well woven, could grant those inclusion dynamics and elasticity that are necessary to promote the multidimensional role of actors in the global scenario; a modular cohesion

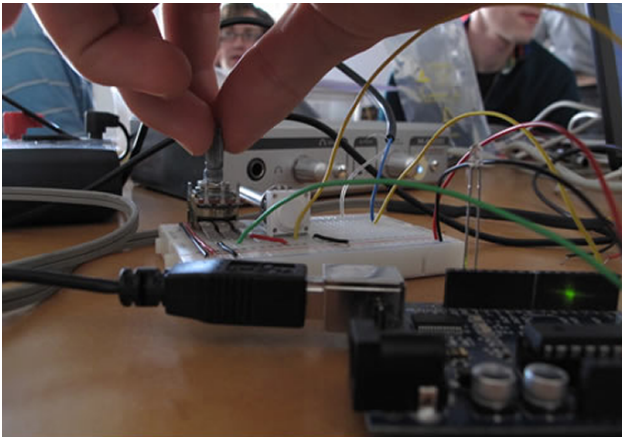
resource that would allow upright experiences to emerge as main characters among global economical flows, without however being

denaturalized or squeezed.

<http://zoes.it/>

The Imal Centre. Culture and Techno In The Heart Of Europe

Silvia Bertolotti



Imal Workshop - Code, Art & Crafts

IMAL is an association created in 1999. From 2007 IMAL (Interactive Media Art Laboratory) has inaugurated its centre for digital and technological culture; a space that reaches 600 mq situated in what used to be an industrial shed in the heart of Brussels, becoming a place of encounter between artistic, scientific and industrial experimentation. A space, dedicated to research, digital culture and new media.

IMAL is fundamentally a laboratory for research, experimentation and production for artists, a center of formation which organized workshops and internships; a space for exhibitions, concerts, performances and conferences all under the same denominator of interdisciplinary and interaction between audience, artist

and researcher.

Right during this period, from the 4th of June to August 20th, PLAYLIST: playing games, music, art, an exhibition about the reinvention of objects and digital obsolete media, is running. The event presents artists work from the scene of “chiptune” and from digital arts, that have conquered old PC’s and consoles in order to extract new contexts both visual and audio. (<http://www.imal.org/playlist>)

I personally met with the director of IMAL, Yves Bernard and his collaborator Marie-Laure Delaby for pleasant chat about the history and the activities, in the center that they manage, let alone about the panorama of digital art today and about the production and diffusion in Brussels and in Europe.



Imal Expo

Silvia Bertolotti: How was the idea of a center dedicated to digital arts as IMAL born and what was your personal story?

Yves Bernard: The association was founded 10 years ago. Originating from the field of research, the idea was to create a kind of laboratory for artists working on new technologies and new media. In the 90s we therefore created a media lab for national and international artists, but it was in 2000 that it held its first major project involving Finland, France and Belgium at the Brussels Expo. Since 2007 we have had a stable base here, an area of 600 square meters which has helped to consolidate the identity dell'IMAL and build a more stable relationship with the public. The idea is still the same, namely that of a center that is both a laboratory and production site, which also hosts workshops and events for the public.

Silvia Bertolotti: What is your vision,

as privileged observer, of the current situation of the digital arts in Belgium and Europe in general?

Yves Bernard: In Europe you only find always and only either workshops or exhibitions. It is difficult and rare to find these two events combined. On the contrary, this would be a winning combination, and that is what we want to do at IMAL. At a European level, there are institutions and art centers in Spain (Laboral, Hangar), France (GMEA, Cie Incidents Mémorables, Art Sensitif), Finland (m-cult), Holland (V2 Mediamatic) and Germany with whom we also collaborate with. In Belgium, for the most part we have workshops. We must also consider in this sense that Brussels has a strategic position within Europe, and a kind of privileged place that allows the meeting and therefore the dialogue between artists, designers and the public. And this is surely an advantage which our centre takes into account and is trying to develop.

Silvia Bertolotti: Which partners are more open to the emergence of digital arts: institutions, companies or research centers? Who mainly collaborates??

Yves Bernard: We are currently setting up partnerships with the most varied institutions: from European art centers, to university research centers

(particularly French and Belgian), small firms in the technology sector, which are also strongly encouraged by the dialogue with artists and creative sector workers



Silvia Bertolotti: What position do you give to research and science / technology? In general what is the role of research in the field of digital arts at the moment? I saw that in your program have space, in fact, thematic meetings on the relationship between art and science.

Yves Bernard: Technology is certainly integral to our era and our daily lives. However, it must be discovered and meet the needs of socio-cultural experimentation. This requires a dialogue and exchange with the artistic and creative practices. It is in this sense that we try to act as a center: allowing the two spheres to meet, start up a dialogue and enrich each other. We believe in giving the utmost importance to technological innovation and research a social and

cultural dimension. In this sense IMAL seeks to represent a point of contact between art and science.

Silvia Bertolotti: What is at present, if there is one, the winning formula for the centers of digital art: workshops, festivals or performances? In what direction do you work?

Yves Bernard: I do not think there is a winning formula, but surely there is a successful combination, as the history and current situation of IMAL demonstrates: that is the union with exhibiting and the laboratory. This essentially translates as the combination of promotion and dissemination together with testing and production. But above all I think is important to always work at all levels, covering all bases. Testing, producing and educating are directions that must cross-over at any time. And it is this cross-over, in fact, that enables the discovery of new ideas and it is always at different levels: that is for the different artistic languages as well as the artists themselves, as well as the creative possibilities that are in place to generate such “emergencies”

•



Imal Workshop

Silvia Bertolotti: What is the role of the interaction-participation with the public? What are your plans to go in this direction?

Yves Bernard: The ateliers allow the involvement of the public. Indeed, we have always had great success during the workshops organized. They involve not only artists, but “creative people” at large. But everyone has the opportunity of performing live and to meet in person, physically and face to face. This is a dimension that artists often complain about, and unfortunately it is true that interaction is lost today, and this goes hand in hand with the development of technology. But we still emphasise the importance of direct exchange and encounter between people, not just in society but also in artistic terms so often that in fact we discover new ‘vocations’ by people who are confronted with different languages and artists.

Silvia Bertolotti: What is the target

and the type of artists you work with?

Yves Bernard: As art center we favour the spread of information, we presented international artists like Jodi, Maurice Chevalier, or collectives such as the “Holy Fire” group that saw the presence of international names. We prefer to organize exhibitions based on collectives rather than individual artists, such as the current “Playlist”. As for the laboratories we focus instead mainly on the discovery of unknown artists who can produce their works through us.

Silvia Bertolotti: Is it more difficult for a centre such as yours to promote the ‘production’ of work or the ‘spread’ of artistry?

Yves Bernard: Both are two key words in general, but especially for the IMAL. We focus on both of them equally. The production, when we give the opportunity for artists to work on their projects, is without doubt the easiest and more direct part. The spread however, being an activity more diluted over time and therefore longer and more challenging, is certainly the most difficult.



Imal Share

Silvia Bertolotti: What are your future plans for IMAL and what new projects are you beginning?

Yves Bernard: We are concentrating principally on these main projects:

- the construction of an Audiovisual Library, that aims to preserve digital art works. We have already taken a first step in creating an archive on our youtube channel

(

<http://www.youtube.com/user/imag>

[icy](#)). But the idea is to construct a real 'mediateca' in physical and virtual terms, which responds to the fear of disintegration and disappearance of digital work, to ensure durability instead.

- The creation of a Media Lab, which is a sort of artist residency for national and international artists. This also because Brussels is becoming the place where European and non-European artists are deciding to settle. So we would intervene in the creation of a meeting place where a dialogue can be started between the arts and their creators.

<http://www.imal.org>

<http://www.youtube.com/user/imag>
[icy](#)

<http://www.imal.org/playlist>

When Archive Becomes Art. Megaloop: Thirty Years Of Tam

Annamaria Monteverdi



Team Teatromusica - Mostra Megaloop - Sala 1: Immagini Pre-Istoriche

The Tam Teatromusica, the well-known theatrical and video-theatre Italian company, has reached thirty years of artistic activity and celebrates this achievement with a truly memorable retrospective exhibition in Padua. It was 1980 when Michael Sambin, Pierangela Allegro and Laurent Dupont combined their expertise in the field of performing arts, music and experimental video art and gave life to the company, based in Padova.

The Megaloop exhibition supervised by Richard Cardura from the Altiline Cultural Centre in Padova, puts memory on stage in a generous, rich and carefully made construction. Which pays homage to the coherent artistic work of TAM: through the space of the rooms, where the

exhibition is set up, strands of time are literally lit up. On show there are some videos of the shows but also projects, props and musical instruments which have been perfectly modified; there are visual cues that are simply original storyboards by the eclectic Michele Sambin (musician and visual artist), cues which are similar to musical scores and valuable sketches of the scene. In them the painting taste, watercolour painting taste in particular, prevails.

We met Sambin and Allegro. They guided us on this synaesthetic journey into the memory of Tam. The first room housed the pre-, that is the activities of Sambin between 1976 and 1979 when he started experiencing conceptual works at the International University of Art in Venice and the Galleria del Cavallino using a AKAI 1/4 videotape, as a reminiscence of Cage, Moholy-Nagy, Norman Mac Laren, Oskar Fischinger.

In these years he invented the technique of loop systematically applied to vocal and music video performances (from this, the title of

the exhibition): combining the coil of the recording to that of the reading, an infinite loop of video images takes life. These run and deteriorate over time, restoring, in the old Sony Trinitron monitor, a body that splits endlessly, talking to itself,



Team Teatromusica - Mostra Megaloop - Sala 3: Corpo Strumento

The video really becomes a “Mac Luhan” extension of the body of the performer. Inside the site of Tam but especially the anthology published for the occasion by Titivillu, which minutely collects the studies by several artists through pictures and DVD attachments, it is possible to find proof of these pioneering trials of videotape art, unanimously recognised as the debut of electronic art in Italy (see the catalogue by Bruno di Marino, “Elettroshock. Thirty years of video art in Italy” and the catalogue dedicated to Michele Sambin “Invideo 2003”).

Let's quote at least *Il tempo consuma* the most tautological and conceptual work by Sambin that significantly

opens (and closes in a loop) the exhibition: it is a work with which Sambin gives Tam his experimental art heritage which investigates time, which manipulates it, reversing it and making it infinite: “While investigating these multiple possibilities of expressive expansion – says Sambin – I investigate the idea of infinity, a process generated by the performer which the device multiplies continuously. In doing so I also think about the fleeting nature of electronic writing and of its supports”.

Sambin remembered the transition from video performance to theatre as a passage which was, in some ways, compulsory : “My move to the theatre is due – thanks to or unfortunately due – to the Transavanguardia by Achille Bonito Oliva, he said. In those years there was a huge explosion of performativity. I lived those years as a joy for the interlacing of arts and meetings. I met Laurie Anderson and Marina Abramovic, characters that have drawn a line of non-painting, non-sculpture, of something far away from the market. The transavanguardia breaks those utopias typical of the Seventies which were creating difficulties for the art system (videos could not be sold). Bonito Oliva brought art back to discipline: painting and sculpture. And above all he gave it back to the market.”

Armoniche, the work created for the Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara, at the time directed by Lola Bonora, is the first work by Tam: a grid of musical intervals is defined by the shapes of the square, the straight line, the parallels and the star. It defines the basic choreography of the performers which inhale and exhale through a harmonic, in time; some geometric lines are in the meantime projected onto their bodies. It is conceived in order to return, in the best way, the path of the memory of the ephemeral art par excellence which cannot be played again, like theatre. Tam has ingeniously planned a performative summary of the works with the interpretation of some young collaborators of the company accompanied by some live music by Sambin playing sax or bass clarinet for some evenings during the exhibition. So the show (and memory) is really dramatised.



Team Teatromusica - Mostra Megalooop - Sala 4: Drammaturgia Sonora

The history of yesterday runs until

today without interruption. In a loop. Each room has its own title and theme. Each room hosts a selection of theatrical plays which are broadcast on video and are represented in video installations with visual-soundtracks consisting of coloured storyboards. As Sambin explains: "We need them to imagine the plays and to communicate it but they do not want to give full details." One of the most fascinating rooms is undoubtedly the one called *Il corpo come strumento* with which, referring to Mauricio Kagel and his opera *Repertoire*, Tam begins a new foundation of body language.

They actually reinterpret originally the item-instrument in its concept, especially for the cello, in a both ironic and erotic game of similarities that leads to a doubling, to a sound-corporeality to a humanization of the musical instrument and its sinuous shapes; to something Nam June Paik would have appreciated very much, having devoted his TV Bra series to the humanization of electronics with Charlotte Moorman playing the cello while wearing little videos as a bra.

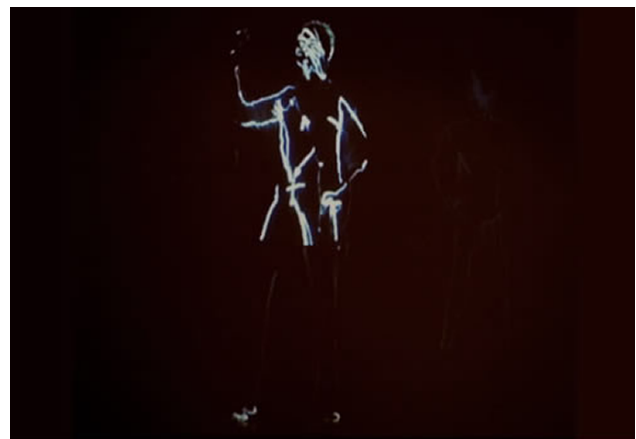
The play of references between body and instrument reaches its peak with *Perdutamente* which is inspired by *Violon d'Ingres* by Man Ray and *Se San Sebastian sapesse* inspired by the iconography of the martyrdom of St. Sebastian. In it the cello, as well as the

sensual body which replicates it, is pierced by arches. *Blasen* may be the most symbolic work on this journey. In it, Pierangela Allegro plays the trombone by moving a coulisse and generating a current that goes into a spot located at the tip of the instrument. It approaches and moves away from her face, lighting it or keeping it in shadow. It would be hard not to link these experiences to the contemporary works by Laurie Anderson, in particular to the famous *Tape-bow violin*, where she put the head of a recorder instead of the strings and a magnetic tape recorded on the brace.

The journey continues in the sign of a “sound dramaturgy”: with the presentation of the sound opera *Barbablu* and *Children's corner*. Tam has started its evolution. In particular this was due to art galleries. The repertoire of musical-theatre and commissions from major institutions like La Scala or Rai, a greater audience and larger venues gave TAM the chance to work with a technology (audio, video, and lights) more suited to their needs. It allowed them to refine and test new techniques. Moreover they evolved also thanks to young collaborators who began to participate in TAM's adventure.

Accurate sound spatializations, special light projects, sound and video CG animation effects in the scene (as

in *Anima Blu* which is inspired by Chagall and his paintings) became increasingly dominant in their theatrical and musical aesthetics. It is impossible to remember all the many works at the exhibition and the tracks which are assigned to viewers. Just one example: the video-theatre work *Medit'azioni*, realised in collaboration with Giacomo Verdi and with the inmates of the Due Palazzi prison. It is an immense work that brings theatre into the social context, in the sphere of total institutions, a territory everyone should think about.



Team Teatromusica - Mostra Megalooop - Sala 7: Ultimo Atto

In parallel to research Tam active in Padua workshops on music-theatre: the willingness to dialogue with new generations and the versatility of digital media brought them to expand their collaborations working with the artist and video-graphic designer Raffaella Rivi and with East Rodeo, a group of musicians coming from the East Balkans. Rodeo has actually become the sound soul of some of

the most important projects Tam has been working on in the recent years. Among others *Stupor Mundi* which was housed in a high-impact site-specific, the Maniace di Siracusa Castle in 2004 for the Festival of Ortigia. In it, the audience, which was travelling between eight stations along the terraces, could see some fragments of videos inspired by the medieval iconography and Federico di Svevia from above the balustrades.

These videos were cut and placed on high flags which were dragged on the shoulders by the musicians-performers. Some other video projections were projected right onto the architectural surfaces and onto the floors. Tam also began to use the graphic tablet as a further contribution to real-time visual effects. In *Deforma* the bodies of the musicians-performers which were simulating multi-faceted geometric shapes were drawn and literally reinvented live by Sambin. The graphic sign realised - very similar to what William Kentridge did for his *Drawing for projection* - was projected right onto them; but once

the man had slipped away, the painting and the light were still projected onto the backdrop.

leads the path towards its end, the end of the show. It uses images taken from

. And the circle of memory, like a loop, ends. And it starts again. The exhibition also brings to completion TAM's new model of artistic archive storage. This merged into a book ("Megaloop" by Fernando Marchiori with numerous contributions by researchers) and three DVD boxes which can be purchased. They gather not only the historical video-heritage of the company but also texts, story-boards, press releases, texts, scores, photographs. The archive is a precious digital instrument for scholars and researchers of contemporary theatre and a good model of a conceptual map for those media centres that are beginning to collect, organize and make available the memory of video art.

<http://www.tamteatromusica.it/megaloop/megaloop.htm>

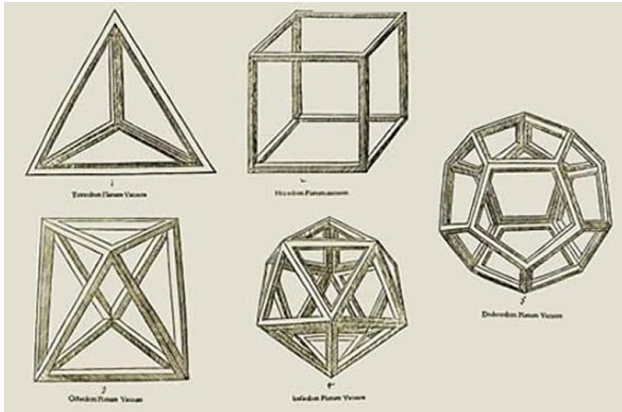
Deforma

Il Tempo

Consuma

Chora Platonica And Digital Matrix

Eugenia Fratzeskou



[Fig. 1] Leonardo da Vinci's drawing of open-faced Platonic solids for Pacioli's book "De Divina Proportione"
[Gunderson, David S., Leonardo da Vinci's Models: Open Faced Platonic Solids]

and this is why it seems to be different each time (2)

As Prof. of Philosophy Donald Zeyl explains, Chora can be understood as a “totally characterless subject that temporarily in its various parts gets characterized in various ways” so that the “observed particulars” are only its parts (3).

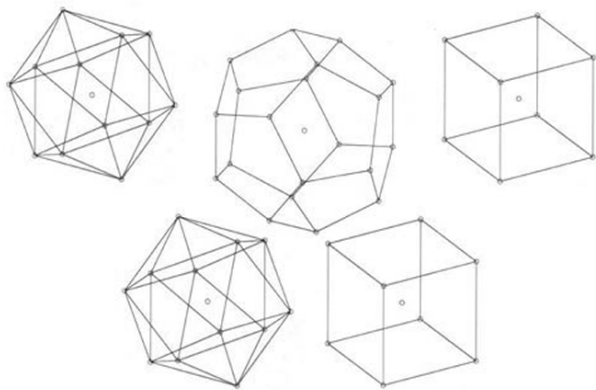
1. CHORA

As can be seen in Plato's *Timaeus*, space plays a significant role in cosmology. Alongside Models/Ideals and their imitations, Plato uses (*Chôra*), that is, an ‘invisible and formless receptacle... of all becoming’ where Forms are materialised, in a sense close to space (1). Despite the hermeneutic difficulties in fully defining it, Chora has set the foundations of the concept of spatiality, place and placing, while the influence of Plato's cosmology is evident even in contemporary science.

Chora receives everything, without ever taking the form of the objects that enter her. She is made as a model for all things, which moves and takes the shape of everything she receives;

The relationship between Chora and its contents is not a ‘water-in-a-jug’ relationship. *Chora* interacts with its contents, while being simultaneously distinct from them in an “unexplainable and complicated way” according to Plato (4). A continuous becoming takes place, as asymmetry causes motion and change. Chora is full of unbalanced and heterogeneous forces; she is both “shaken and shaking” (5). Shapes are created through ideas and numbers. In this creation of the universe, the elementary triangles of the elements are restructured. For instance, during the transitional phases of this creation process, cubes may be disorganised by being cut either at their edges or at the primary triangles from which they have originally derived, resulting in floating flat shapes. Diverse elements are “bonded” with each other through

the use of mathematical analogies, so that “intermediate definitions” are connected [Figure 1 -2]. (6)



[Fig. 2] Digitally Generated Platonic Solids
[http://www-users.math.umd.edu/d97grad/platonic-solids.jpg (accessed: 6/5/2010)]

In order to understand the framework of the *Platonic Chora*, it is important to stress that Plato acknowledges the limitations of cosmology and natural sciences, in a way that relates to the contemporary criticism of scientific limitations. Those limitations still prevail, despite early hopes, like Einstein's, that new technology would eliminate indeterminacy etc.(7) It is impossible to reach the 'absolute truth', due to the distinction between the scientific object and becoming; exactitude and change.

The scientific 'object' is changing constantly and thus, natural laws have to be continuously revised and redefined under the light of new evidence. Plato also rejects the possibility of a “higher degree of truth” in “intuitive imagination” (unlike Bergson) and myth. Plato assigns the status of the “exact science” to

mathematics, as they seem to lead to the 'absolute truth'. Mathematics play an important role in his cosmology. As we have already seen, a mathematical matrix characterises the Platonic Chora, enabling the 'birth' of forms.(8)

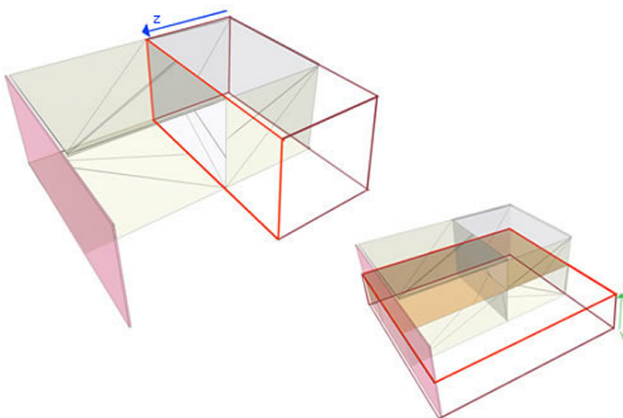
2. MATRICE DIGITALE

The *Platonic Chora* has a 'smooth surface where imitations are imprinted'.(9) The investigation into whether and how the concept of Chora would relate to the algorithmic space of VR is challenging in a philosophical and creative sense, particularly in terms of the ways through which, the boundaries of digital forms are generated through the algorithmic 'substratum' of the digital matrix.

A computer 3D modelling system has a highly complex infrastructure that consists of diverse computational models i.e. binary, numerical and graphical.(10) The generation of a digital form is achieved through a series of data conversions that occur between those models with the aid of transformation matrices. Such an infrastructure may be understood as a superimposition of diverse algorithmic grids, through which, a digital form can be progressively generated from the conversion of binary data into assemblages of points that form co-ordinated vectors in an abstract mathematical 'space'

for creating oriented polygons that are subsequently, joined hierarchically so as to simulate the shaded and coloured 3D boundaries of solid volumes.

Nevertheless, the computational infrastructure tends to be highly abstract, imprecise, irregular and unstable, as it is inherently probabilistic and a-causal. There is a considerable discord between the models of the computational infrastructure, as each of them conforms to very different laws e.g. Boolean algebra axioms versus geometric proofs.(11) Consequently, there are numerous conversion errors in the interchanges between the computational models, which produce paradoxical outcomes, as several precarious interplays occur between complexity and abstraction.



[Figs. 4a & 4b]: Two phases of irregular Boolean Intersection that result in a compound invalid solid. 3D models by Eugenia Fratreskou (Copyright by E. Fratreskou, 2004-2010, all rights reserved).

Unexpected geometric visualisations and behaviours are the outcome of a seemingly simple and consistent plan of action. We begin to realise the

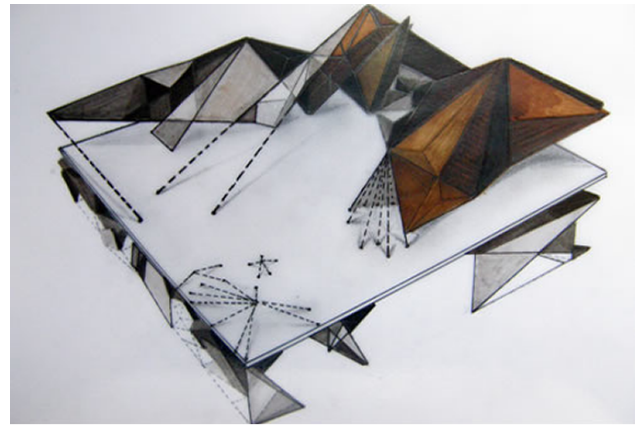
wider complexity of the co-ordinates that cause inconsistencies between cause and effect, into which, such a plan falls. Complicated excessive beginnings & unsettling elliptical ends emerge that call for new connections.

The algorithmic space of VR cannot be regularised and unified in any way, not even through the simulation of what appears to be a simple and orderly geometric 'construction'. The inherent irregularities of computer 3D modelling systems undermine the geometrical completeness and thus, the properties and behaviours of digital models. Digital solids become invalid.(12) The visualisation of a digital boundary becomes paradoxical, as the distinctions between void and solid volumes, exterior and interior sides of the digital solid tend to collapse. The case of Boolean volume-based modelling is representative of how such inconsistencies occur. Invalid solids are compound, because the original intersected, unified or subtracted solids cannot be fully integrated to constitute a single solid. The orientation of their surface becomes highly ambiguous, and thus, their geometrical elements are neither well-connected nor properly placed by the application.

Excessive, non-hierarchical polygon accumulation characterises the surfaces of the invalid solid.

Consequently, the 'traces' of its construction 'history' remain visible, as its surfaces maintain the colour, orientation, and triangulation of the original solids. The boundary inconsistencies of an invalid solid include invalid edges (that are fragmented or connect less or more than two surfaces), holes, dangling, infinite, self-intersecting, folded and/or superimposed faces etc. [Figs. 3- 4]

As part of my latest drawing research, a series of hand-drawn diagrams enable the visualisation of the 'hidden' stages of boundary generation, during which, paradoxical geometries emerge at the 'inter-passage' from one algorithmic model to the other. These stages are not visible when modelling solids. Nevertheless, through the drawings, it has been possible to invent the possible visualisation of those stages creatively, based on how the computer infrastructure operates. The emergence of infra-spaces is of particular interest. They unexpectedly occur between various geometrical orders. Unpredictable and unsettling shifts occur between ideal, realistic and invalid forms that have floating surfaces, excessive boundaries, ambiguous depth, surface tension, dynamic non-oriented constellations of geometrical points, reversed geometry etc. [Figs. 5a & 5b]



[Figs. 5a & 5b]: Drawing infra-spaces. A series of hand-drawn diagrams by Eugenia Fratzeakou (Copyright by E. Fratzeakou, 2008-2010, all rights reserved).

3. FROM SPACE TO PLACE AND VICE VERSA

Traditionally, conventional built architecture is associated with the notions of functionality, stability and order. Based on this rationale, the enclosure, permanence, uniformity, solidity and integrity of the ideal and generic form of the cube are taken for granted. Kenneth Frampton's writings on place are of particular relevance here, in terms of understanding the status and purpose of 'building as dwelling':

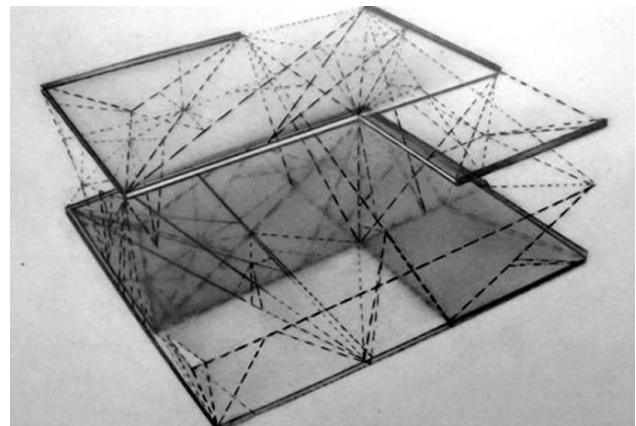
Place, as an Aristotelian phenomenon, arises... at a concrete level with the establishment of an articulate realm on which man ... may come into being. The receptivity... of a place... depends... on its stability in the everyday sense. (13)

As we have seen however, Chora is both shaken and shaking, and full of unbalanced and heterogeneous forces. As we can see in

contemporary science and cosmology, space is indeed, polymorphous, while it dynamically and constantly evolves in a similar way. Building on these characteristics, relativistic spaces may emerge through interchangeable states of symmetry and asymmetry. Moreover, dynamic interactions may occur between the various orders of space due to a wider set of changing co-ordinates and variables. Because of those interactions, which may be often invisible and ignored, the conventional concept of the boundary of built architecture is challenged.

This new understanding of space has been informed particularly from Einstein's theory of relativity, quantum physics and the advancement of information processing technology. According to Lev Manovich, as the educator and critic Monika Bakke describes, this change marks the shift from Modernism to "informationalism". Consequently, the focal point is not objects and forms, but various 'information flows', as space is defined as an 'informational substance'.⁽¹⁴⁾ Moreover, artists' and architects' interest in the interactions between the environment, built architecture and data-scapes has grown, enabling the creation of new kinds of site-specific interventions, spatial practices and theories. ⁽¹⁵⁾

Interestingly, both Chora and VR have a mathematical 'matrix'. In Chora, the interchangeable phases of dynamic disorganisation and reconstruction are the necessary stages of a cosmogony that is characterised of unity and order, but not of homogeneity, so that heterogeneity and asymmetry cause eternal motion and change. ⁽¹⁶⁾ Nevertheless, the generation of digital space in VR is inherently flawed and indeterminate. We may thus argue that instead of the original Platonic solids, we not only get their invalid digital counterparts but also, paradoxical new kinds of geometry that has multiple dimensions.



[Figs. 5a & 5b]: Drawing infra-spaces. A series of hand-draw diagrams by Eugenia Fratzezkou (Copyright by E. Fratzezkou, 2008-2010, all rights reserved).

A creative and philosophical investigation of the possible 'in-between' spaces of architecture can be inspired by the Platonic Chora in relation to contemporary science, cosmology and the algorithmic space of VR. A conventional type of Modernist built architecture can be

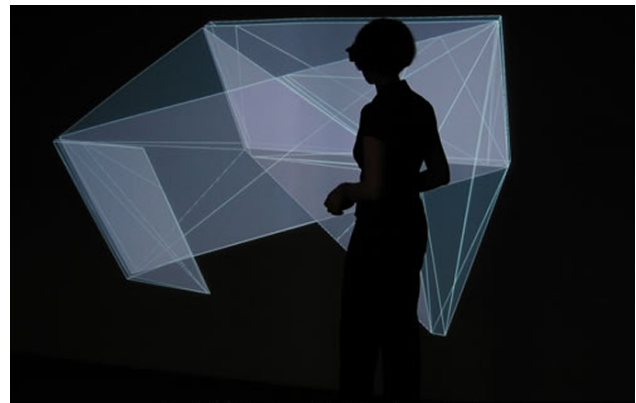
perceived as a materialised 3D fragment of a grid. As it derives from the algorithmic matrix of VR, the arithmetic order of the grid is flawed, while the traditional definition and status of the boundary are challenged.

The paradoxical in-between spaces that emerge between the various orders of place and space, can be creatively visualised and explored at the inter-passages that can be invented between those orders.(16) In particular, it is possible to reveal paradoxical 'residual' spaces that occur between the superimposed and interacting algorithmic, geometrical, topological and structural grids of architecture.

An inter-passage is not synonymous with the suspension of what S. Kwinter describes as a "mesoformic stage" of substances.(17) This stage is only a passage between incidents of regeneration. As Kwinter claims, the recreation process is only an expected, indeterminate delay in a substance's route from one state to the other. The mesoformic stage is a predictable linear passage, whereas an inter-passage enables the visualisation of the unexpected half/by-products that originate from a seemingly consistent and simple method of architectural 3D modelling.

The emerging heterogeneous residual spaces are left as an open-ended

inter-passage, for inviting viewers' constant refocusing between the built and virtual boundaries of architecture. It is precisely through this refocusing that our uncertainties of reasoning, spatial perception & memory are exposed, while new types of site-specific art and spatial research are inspired [Figs 6- 7].



[Fig.6]: Rotation site-specific virtual environment series.
A User interacts with a stereoscopically projected digital 3D model of an invalid solid within a semi-immersive environment.
Originally artwork & photography by Dr Eugenia Fratzeakou
(Copyright by E. Fratzeakou, 2004-2010, all rights reserved).

Notes:

1 – Plato, *Timaeus & Critias* (with translation in modern Greek & comments by the Kaktos Literature Group), Ancient Greek Literature "The Greeks" Series 171, ed. Odysseus Chatzopoulos, Kaktos Publications, Athens, 1993, 50c – 51b, 52d (49a, 52b).

2 – Ibid, 50c (57c,e, 58a-c).

3 – Zeyl, Donald, "Plato's *Timaeus*", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2009 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta
,<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pla>

to-timaeus/ accessed: 5/5/2010.

4 – Plato, *Timaeus & Critias*, (with translation in modern Greek & comments by the Kaktos Literature Group), Ancient Greek Literature “The Greeks” Series 171, ed. Odysseus Chatzopoulos, Kaktos Publications, Athens, 1993, 51a-b.

5 – Ibid, 49d, 52d-e, 53a, 57c,e, 58a-c.

6 – Ibid, 57c-d, 56d, 31c. Comments Nos. 25 & 68, pp. 303, 313.

7 – Ibid, 27d. Comment No. 16, p. 300.

8 – Ibid, 27d. Comment No. 16, pp. 299-300.

9 – Ibid, 50e, 51a-b (50c).

10 – Fratzeskou, Eugenia, *Visualising Boolean Set Operations: Real & Virtual Boundaries in Contemporary Site-Specific Art*, LAP – Lambert Academic Publishing, Saarbrücken, 2009, pp. 69-75.

11 – Ibid, pp. 69-75.



12 – Ibid, pp. 75-130. Fratzeskou, Eugenia, “Inventing New Modes of Digital Visualisation in Contemporary Art” in Special Section “Transactions,” *Leonardo* 41, No. 4 (2008), p. 422.

13 – Frampton, Kenneth, “On reading Heidegger”, *Oppositions reader: selected readings from a journal for ideas & criticism in architecture 1973-1984*, ed. Michael K. Hays, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1998, p.5.

14 – Manovich, Lev & Monika Bakke in *Going Aerial. Air, Art, Architecture*, ed. Monika Bakke, Jan Van Eyck Academie, Maastricht, The Netherlands, 2006, pp. 11, 14-15.

15 – Fratzeskou, Eugenia, “Art & Architecture: Investigation at the Boundaries of Space” in *Digimag*, numero 52, Marzo 2010, www.digicult.it/digimag/article.asp?id=1730

16 – Plato, *Timaeus & Critias*, (traduzione in greco moderno e commenti realizzati dal Kaktos Literature Group), Ancient Greek Literature “The Greeks” Serie 171, ed. Odysseus Chatzopoulos, Kaktos Publications, Athens, 1993, 57c, 58c.

17 – The issue of the inter-passage is investigated in various ways also in the following monographs:
Fratzeskou, Eugenia, *New Types of*

Drawing in Fine Art: The Role of Fluidity in the Creation Process, LAP – Lambert Academic Publishing, Saarbrücken, 2010 and Fratzeskou, Eugenia, *Operative Intersections: Between Site-Specific Drawing and Spatial Digital Diagramming*, LAP –

Lambert Academic Publishing, Saarbrücken, 2010.

18 – Kwinter, S., “Mies and movement...” in ed. Detlef Mertins, Princeton Architectural Press, 1994, pp.93, 91-94.

The presence of Mies,

Sonarcinema 2010. Music For Eyes And Brains

Giulia Baldi



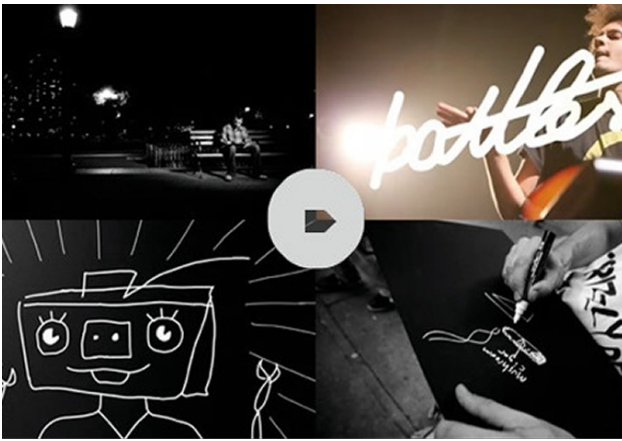
Ben Whalley - Synth Britannia BBC 4

For those like us (Italians, if you were wondering) who come from places where national TV programs are superficial and squalid, and completely detached from both our real and our imaginary worlds, one of the most interesting experiences at Sonar Festival is offered by the chance to discover quality music videos and documentaries. No way the proposal can be exhaustive, of course, but it is definitely the result of a careful selection.

Too many editions have passed now to remember all names and titles discovered in the years, but the memory of the time spent in the CCCB / MACBA cinema between a live and a DJ sets is always sharp. And if someone wonders why we have decided to (briefly) lock ourselves in a cinema during a summer festival ...

well, music can be many things, including a form of communication, a pleasant way to read the social and political realm So, finding out the 'who's' and the 'what's' behind the beloved sounds and rhythms of our 'everydays' is of course invaluable. Luckily, we now have the web, and so many sources that we can't even count them.

But is there (in places like Italy) the culture to make the best out of this availability? Do we understand (in Italy) how important, interesting and fun is to put the music in context? While the Italian music magazines and radios, at least occasionally, do make a good job of their information role, unfortunately the same can not be said of the TV, especially if compared to other civilized countries In Italy both the past and the present of music are virtually absent from the small screen, music channels included.



Warp 20 (New York) - NYC

So, since we are all still *50% nature and 50% nurture*, we definitely do not have much experience and, quite often, we do have even less curiosity... So? So this year at Sonar let's go to the movies! Even if nothing else will be added to the program, the titles announced up till now will anyway make us happy (and, by the way, two of the films are ideas and achievements of young Italian filmmakers, and this should make us feel particularly involved.)

SonarCinema Barcelona will screen' 5 movies: *Amplified gesture*, produced by David Sylvian ; *Synth Britannia*, produced by BBC to tell the story of English Synth Pop ; *Warp 20* (New York) - NYC, produced by Warp Films ; *Warp 20 And thee Echo*, produced by Warp Films ; *We call it Skwee*, produced by Genome Inc. in cooperation with ATMO Stockholm, Flogsta Danshall and Harmonia records.

The first one, *Amplified gesture*,

directed by Phil Hopkins, has been conceived as a visual complement to Sylvian's last album, *Manafon*, but obviously has a great value even by itself, as an audiovisual research on the difficult art of improvisation. The work includes interviews with some of the most important musicians dedicated to the genre (but, is this a genre? or a technique? this is also deeply discussed in the interviews) including Evan Parker, Keith Rowe, Christian Fennesz y Otomo Yoshihide, who have also collaborated with Sylvian on the album and Toshimaru Nakamura, Eddie Prevost, Sachiko M, John Tilbury, Werner Dafeldecker, Michael Moser and John Butcher. A rare opportunity to hear the voices of these brilliant and usually quite bashful composers.

http://www.manafon.com/amplified_gesture/



David Sylvian - Manafon

Synth Britannia, directed by Ben Whalley, is probably the documentary most loved by electronic music fans in recent years, and certainly the most chatted about (the BBC has rightly noted that the net and the social media, for the first time, allowed even those who could not watch it to receive stimuli and express opinions... and it's true! on twitter and facebook there is still a lot of talking about it after months, with people sharing key sentences, extracts, and playlists).

And the reasons of this success are quite clear - it's a truly engaging history of the difficult but incredible conquest of the world by British synth pop, based on archive images and original interviews with the post-punk generation, those brave musicians (inspired by Kraftwerk - and partly by JG Ballard) that the world knows as Throbbing Gristle, Cabaret Voltaire, Ultravox, Soft Cell, OMD, Depeche Mode, Vince Clarke, Yazoo, The Human League and Gary Numan (the first to reach Top of the Pops in 1979). 'We have always acted on instinct, but now I think the secret of our success lies in the fact that we were five minutes ahead the others... but only 5 minutes', says Daniel Miller, former founder of The Normal and Mute records, snapping the tears of emotion for his humility and clarity. Literally, a documentary not to be missed.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00n93c4>

Warp 20 (New York) NYC e Warp 20 And thee Echo are both films that celebrates 20 years of Warp with extensive extracts from some of their best artists' gigs. The first, filmed in New York by the Italian Lorenzo Fonda (the author known for 'Megunica', a film on Blue in Central and South America), includes bits of live performances by Jamie Lidell, Born Ruffians,!, Hudson Mohawk, Pivot, Clark, The Hundred In The Hands, Flying Lotus and Battles, edited together with interviews and animation. The second, filmed in London a few months later by Vincent Moon, portrays on stage and behind it artists like Mira Calix, Broadcast and Battles. You already know everything about Warp and its recent Renaissance these films are just a brilliant confirmation.

<http://warp.net/films>



We Call It Skweee

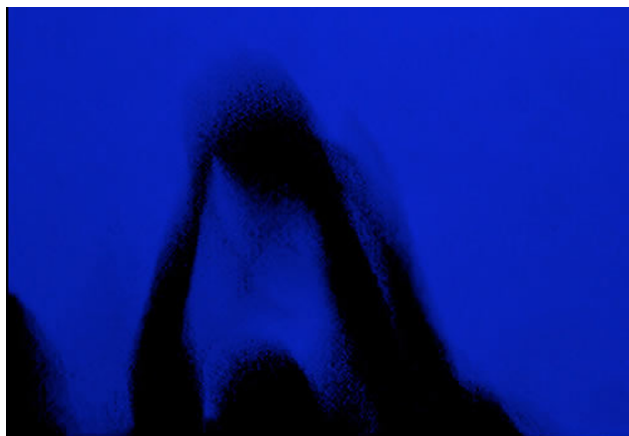
We call it Skweee brings the attention on Northern Europe and in particular on Sweden, which in recent years not only showed amazing creativity and innovation in music entrepreneurship (Spotify anyone?), but also surprised musically, with a new genre that combines funk, electro and dubstep, but it sounds new. Skweee is the onomatopoeic name that has been given to the genre, and apparently it derives from the use of vintage synthesizers to extract (*to squeeze out* in English) the most interesting sounds.

And James Patierno is the passionate director who came in contact with this scene during a working experience in Sweden (of course) and decided to follow the story of some of the Skweee musicians for over a year, just to pull off a sort of musical road movie. That drag the viewers from the cold North of Scandinavia to the warm South of Catalonia (and Sonar), where in 2008 the Skweee was represented with a really surprising and refreshing show case.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skweee>

Lookat Festival. Between Interactivity And Contemplation

Giulia Simi



Giulia Gerace / Tiziana Bertondini - Sospensione

It is more and more evident that contemporary culture and art are able to communicate to a public which goes beyond the simple niche of professionals. It is also difficult to ignore the fact that the new media offer a great contribution to this phenomenon. Lastly, it is a matter of fact that the vernissages of exhibitions, events and theme festivals are more and more crowded. However, when this happens in small towns, often accused to be unable to satisfy the requests and practices of electronic and digital art, it means that the “long queue” has already created a positive effect which is impossible to ignore.

LookAt Festival has reached this year its fourth edition. It is an event dedicated to video art and electronic

music, hosted this year in the charming rooms of Fondazione Ragghianti in Lucca. Cured by Elena Marcheschi and artistically directed by Fabio Bertini, the just concluded edition titled *ImmaginAzioni* (ImmaginActions) was organized as an exhibition opened to visitors' choice aiming at exploring the double soul of new media: the contemplative one and the interactive one. Moreover, it hosted the visions and experiments of well known artists, whose poetics includes different media while building up powerful and involving scenarios.

Presented on a shared and open-t-dialogue level, the two dimensions – the one of gestures and the one of look – offered the visitors/actors an “ecologic” view, aiming at restore above all the contemporary value of contemplative act, sometimes with the risk of extinction in front of an appeal that the simulated and shared immersion in digital technologies is able to offer.



Marco Pucci - Vedini

Divided into nine video installation distributed in two areas - *Immagin / Action* - the rooms of the Fondazione Ragghianti have been invaded by an heterogeneous public of young and elderly people, professionals and mere curious people during the opening day on 15 May.

If assisting to the performances of the well known video artist Giacomo Verde seemed to be a privilege for some very punctual people (included me. I came only 3 minute later and conquered my place by elegantly elbowing among an unexpected crowd), the queue to take part to interactive installations forced the organization to postpone of an hour the exhibition closing time. Can we still say that the contemporary culture is an auto referential game without a public? Can we still justify the fact that it is often ignored or relegated in the last pages of the public agenda?

We talked about these themes and the cultural line of the festival with

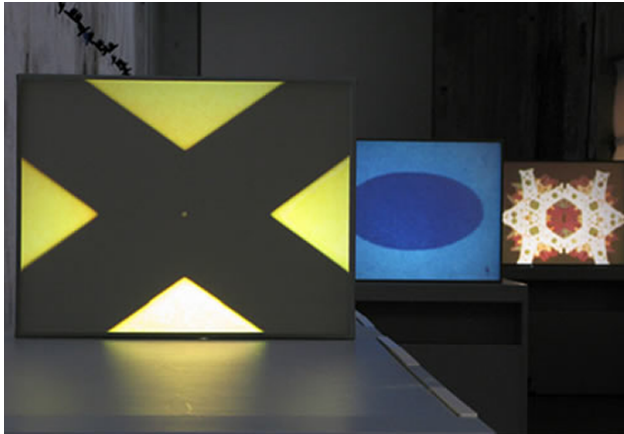
the curator, Elena Marcheschi.

Giulia Simi: LookAt Festival has already reached its fourth edition. For the first time it has been hosted in the prestigious rooms of Fondazione Ragghianti in Lucca and for the second time you have been the curator. Could you tell us something about the birth and development of this project, above all in relationship with the territory where it takes place?

Elena Marcheschi: LookAt Festival was created in 2007 from an idea of Fabio Bertini, who worked at the outfitting of the exhibition *Arte del Video. Viaggio dell'uomo immobile*, organized in 2004 at the Fondazione Ragghianti and curated by Vittorio Fagone. He then thought of fulfilling the project of an annual festival dedicated exclusively to video installations.

After having seen the works of art of some artists such as Bill Viola, Studio Azzurro, Fabrizio Plessi and many others, and after having understood the difficulties for contemporary art to emerge in Lucca - a city which is more and more addressed to the promotion of other forms of art - the initial idea was to give space and visibility to video installations created by local artists by showing them in an exhibition organized in the former tobacco factory (Manifattura

Tabacchi), a “container” abandoned for many years but where the energies and dynamism of the past still resound.



Sara Rossi - Tv Effect

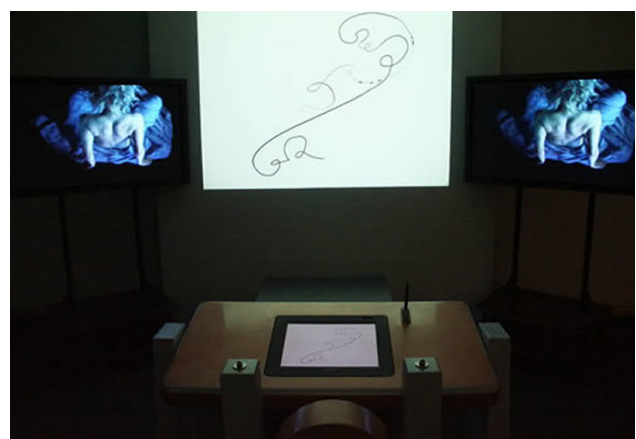
The foundation of LookAt Festival is therefore strictly linked to the territory of Lucca, but during time its horizon has widened.

In 2008, the second edition featured a selection of young artists and a “delegation” of Spanish artists for a total of 13 video installations. From this edition the festival has acquired the “videoart and music” form and, besides video installations, the organization began to promote events linked to the most advanced forms of electronic music and was able to involve different kinds of public within the rooms of Manifattura.

In 2009 Fabio Bertini contacted me to appoint me as curator of the exhibition. In this way *Luci(di) corpi* was founded, an exhibition where we showed 8 video installations created

by eight Italian artists, who were no more chosen from the Lucca area, but who were active at national and international level. The exhibition theme was the body and it took place again in the former tobacco factory, although in a different area than the former editions. It also had a great response from the public and an excellent feedback by professionals.

ImmaginAzioni, the art exhibition that I have curated this year, is exhibited for the first time within LookAt Festival in the exhibition rooms of Fondazione Ragghianti. This was a great opportunity for us and at the same time it was an honour that we understood as appreciation of our job by an institution that in the past years supported this initiative. And actually we feel that this step represents a kind of “circle closure” as the inspiration for the festival came exactly from this same place.



Mario Canali - Scribble Test

Giulia Simi: The title of this edition is *ImmaginAzioni*, i.e. no video

installations are able to create contemplative and/or interactive scenarios. In the exhibition, the showing spaces give back this alternative by offering the public the opportunity to choose which path to follow as first: *Immagina / Azioni*. What is the reason for this choice? Do you think there is in some way the need and maybe the urgency to recover and re-codify the contemplative dimension linked to electronic and digital art which is more and more identified with interactivity?

Elena Marcheschi: The choice of the title and therefore of the double path *Immagina / Azioni* comes from the need to propose a showcase able to understand the complexity of the nowadays scenario of artistic audio visual electronic research by reflecting on the one side the trend towards a creative experimentation that uses modern technologies (see video-mobile phones in Marco Pucci's installation, the virtual reality in the interactive environment of DN@) and on the other side by reconfirming maybe the oldest and most contemplative dimension of video installations which is linked to more traditional artistic forms such as painting, sculpture, photography, etc.

The idea is therefore to guide the public through paths and suggestions that stimulate all senses and, in some

ways, make people live again the old spectator experience enriching it through transformations and innovations of contemporary art. So the two paths are complementary and necessary in order to track an indicative map of two different ways of understanding the expressive potential of electronic audio visuals means.

Giulia Simi: The artists selected for this festival edition are nine: Mario Canali, Dn@, Theo Eshetu, Giulia Gerace and Tiziana Bertoncini, Marcantonio Lunardi, Lorenzo Pizzanelli and Fariba Ferdosi, Marco Pucci, Sara Rossi, Giacomo Verde. It is a selection that links well known characters, famous also at International level, and other younger artists. This selection is therefore able to offer absolute interesting points of view. Could you explain us your choices?

Elena Marcheschi: I like thinking of *ImmaginAzioni* as a crossing point of experiences, where the most modern technologies meet the traditional ones and difference experiences and visions by ancient and "contemporary" artists are proposed in the same space and lastly where famous and appreciated artists "open the doors" to younger experimenters. I like the idea of mixing and coexistence of ways, the rupture of hierarchies rather than a pyramidal concept of art.

Keeping this in mind, we worked in order to make the Festival evolve and “mature” during the time. It was born as showcase for young artists but for this edition I wanted to make a step forward.

Taking into account also the value of an exhibition area such as the Fondazione Ragghianti’s one, the most obvious choice was to create a meeting point between consolidated artistic professionals and other “developing” characters, through a curator’s point of view and focusing on the creation of a general qualitative and contentual harmony between the exhibited works of art.



Giulia Simi: A last question is necessary as regards the situation of contemporary art in Italy. In the introduction text to the exhibition, Fabio Bertini, festival creator and director expresses an idea of evident denunciation towards public institutions that year by year find it harder to recognize the strategic

importance of supporting contemporary culture. This obliges people responsible of cultural matters at different levels, above all as regards electronic and digital media, to do a voluntary job trying to resist against a wider project.

However LookAt Festival is able to attract a huge public which isn’t élitist at all, by promoting dialogue also with general public and not only with experts. What do you think about this situation and what could be in your opinion the “key” to come out this immobilism that penalizes not only the contemporary art sector but also the entire culture in our country?

Elena Marcheschi: Fabio Bertini’s denunciation against public institutions, which are less and less interested in economically supporting this kind of initiatives is true. It is a tragically real situation which goes from micro to macro level and affects not only the bigger but also the smaller Italian centers.

This year LookAt Festival was lucky because it had the economic support of Lucca Province and the Fondazione Ragghianti. The town council instead cancelled all funds that could have been used to increase the budget of a quite expensive initiative. To cut it short, the economic resources we will have at our disposal amount to one fourth of what we would need not

only to cover the production and exhibition expenses, but also to promote a better and more organized and responsible management of the many necessary interventions.



Theo Eshetu - Trip to Mount Zuqalla

I don't think the situation will improve, until the institutions don't realize the impact that these events have on the territory (at the Festival inaugural day, on Saturday 15 May, there were more

than 400 persons, whereas on Sunday we registered 180 visitors) and that the contemporary art can be an important resource to invest on, able to promote a "revival" in terms of interested people and qualified visitors. I don't know what is the right solution for this situation, but I'm sure that until institutions such as Tuscany Region continue to allocate the whole budget for culture to few events, that not always grant an effective quality in terms of works of art and exhibitions, the survival of other cultural events – although appreciated and well known among a wide public of experts and common people – will be seriously brought into question.

<http://www.lookatfestival.it/>

Link index

Radiography Of The Matter. Herman Kolgen And The Sound Perception

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<http://www.kolgen.net/>

Vjing For Lights And Colors. The Sketch Projector Of Shantell Martin

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<http://www.shantellmartin.com/>

Verbo: Among Graffiti and Digital. Plotterflux, Videoincursioni And Mapping

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<http://www.v3rbo.com/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/meta2>

<http://www.project-on.it/>

Science And Mind. Mikael Metthey's Interaction Design

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<http://www.digicult.it/digimag/article.asp?id=1158>

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<http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2008/elasticmind/index.html#/209/>

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<http://www.interaction.rca.ac.uk:8080/people/alumni/05-07/mikael-metthey.html>

<http://www.anevolvingcreation.net/>

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<http://impact-art.ning.com>

<http://www.nietnormaal.nl/>

Nueue Musik In Milan. The Rai's Institute Of Phonology Memory

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